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FERNYHURST COURT



FERNYHURST COURT

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CHAPTER I.

LIFE IN A COUNTRY HOUSE.

"All the land in flowery squares,
Beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind,
Smelt of the coming summer, as one large cloud
Drew downward."

TENNYSON.

"PAPA, look what a very black cloud is coming up," said May, perched upon a shaggy brown pony, and waiting at the back of some farm buildings for the Squire, who was overlooking the roofing of a cattle-shed, with the farmer by his side. "Papa's half-hour is very long," she sighed to herself. It was very dull in the corner. For the first ten minutes her patience had been exemplary, her virtue having been much assisted by the great black retriever; but Ranger had frightened away all the chickens, and driven the kitten into a tree, and having exhausted the limited resources of the place, could hardly be kept out of the neighbouring copse. Pansy, too, was growing very fidgety; and May, liking quiet as little as her companions, suddenly

saw with delight the thunder-cloud coming to her assistance.

The Squire looked up at the weather. "By Jove!" (the old schoolboy asseveration is not extinct in England) "we shall be caught if we don't make haste. The churn-house must wait, Allen."

And, to the equal pleasure of child, dog, and pony, they rode off at a great pace, May's little Shetland cantering as fast as it could lay its short legs to the ground, to keep up with the stride of the long-limbed iron-grey old hunter, on which her father went along so rapidly with its swinging trot, without any apparent effort, that it was all the pony could do to hold its own.

"I believe that was the nineteenth request old Allen has made this year," laughed the Squire. "It was quite time to come away. I'm afraid you'll be wet through, Puss, even as it is," he said, as the storm broke over them before they were half-way home.

"Oh, papa, it doesn't signify, it's very nice," answered the child, shaking her brown wet locks (her mane, as her father called them), her cheeks shining in the rain, and her eyes sparkling. They dashed up in the pelting shower, past the old red-

brick house, with its clustered chimneys and ogee gables, which looked warm and pleasant among the tall beech-trees, even in the midst of the rain, on to the stable-yard, and passed into the house by the back-door.

"And now," said her father, taking the bright little face between both his hands, and kissing it, "run up-stairs directly, and get off your wet things, child."

May was the youngest of a large family, and her father's delight. He was supposed to have been rather stern to his other children, but she and he had been constant companions ever since she could walk, and the strictest friends and allies.

"She's such good company," he said one day to the rector, an old college friend, to whom he had given the Fernyhurst living, on the edge of the park, and who was nearly as fond of her as her father.

Railroads have broken up all provincial centres, but this was before the time of railways, and the Squire was a great man in a small way. His estate was one of the largest, and his family the oldest, in a part of the country where the properties were large and the pedigrees long. He was a shy, reserved man, though he had lived a good deal in

the world. He attended, however, to all magistrates', county, and poor-law business, and was respected and liked by his neighbours. He hunted regularly: the foxes were abundant at Fernyhurst, the pheasants plentiful enough (though his sons complained of the want of preserving), and altogether he was esteemed an honourable gentleman, who did his duty both to man and beast.

Mrs. Dimsdale was not so popular as her husband. She was somewhat of a fine lady, and her manners were cold, and what the village called "hotty." She was extremely fond of London, which the Squire had endured and hated for six or eight weeks every season, posting up some eighty miles in the big coach in about ten hours at shortest. Having sadly submitted to be made member for the county, he had spent three wretched years in Parliament; but the misery of the life there was more than he could endure—the late hours, the fierceness of the faction fights in those days, when he had to vote with his party, right or wrong, while he possessed the unfortunate faculty of thinking for himself, without the eloquence to explain his views. At last, having never before been laid up in his life except from a broken bone out hunting, he fell really and honestly sick, and a general dissolution of Parliament having

honourably set him at liberty, he hardly ever again went near town for above a week or two at a time.

His two elder daughters, rather fine and cold, like their mother, had had a governess, and masters, and "proper advantages" in London; but when the little May came into the world, after a couple of brothers, and an interval of many years, it was really too much trouble to begin education all over again, and it was understood that her sisters were to teach her. The eldest, however, soon married, and Miss Cecilia had no vocation whatever in the teaching line; and accordingly May grew up very much as Nature pleased. Her mother ordered her to learn a certain portion of French and music, and sent her to Cecilia when it was supposed to be done, who, languidly putting down her work or her book, let the child gabble through her tenses all wrong, or play through her piece without two notes right in a bar.

But there are other things to be learnt in the world besides French and music—intimacy with a high-minded, cultivated, clever man is of itself the best possible education. Her father did not like to have her long out of his sight, and accordingly, as soon as she could sit a pony, she had followed him about, perfectly fearless, as is often the case with

very young things—too well guarded to have learned to take care for themselves, and too inexperienced to understand what they have escaped. There was plenty of sense and purpose under the mane of shaggy brown curls—more, indeed, than most of the people round her knew of. As time went on, and she grew older, she nibbled at all sorts of subjects, and had read more already than her two sisters put together, although of the most heterogeneous kind: it was done, however, in secret, lest her mother should put a stop to her proceedings, or Cecilia should be contemptuous.

How is it that the most extreme varieties of character are to be found alongside each other in the same family, born of the same parents, bred in much the same circumstances? It is as if Nature had a certain quantity of material given her and did not know how to mix it: all the sugar goes into one corner, all the suet into another, and the plums and the flour are hopelessly divorced. One will be remarkable for caution and common sense, while all the romantic generosity, impulse, and poetry seem to have been monopolised by the next; another is full of dogmatic self-conceit and love of intermeddling: and the humility, tact, and self-denying kindness of the last are equally striking. The Dimasdales varied

almost as widely, and there were so many of them, and of ages so widely apart, that, as in most large families, the different sets were hardly more to each other than common acquaintances. The eldest had married and left home so long before, that May only considered her as a matron whose children were nearly of her own age; next came the august Captain Dimsdale in a Guards regiment, a surprisingly great man to be the son of so very modest and unassuming a father. Cecilia was succeeded by a boy at sea; and the two youngest, Tom and May, were so far cut off from the others that they almost seemed to belong to another family, and were a good deal thrown upon each other. Although, as being "only a girl," and two or three years younger than himself, Tom considered it a great condescension to play with her in the holidays, yet she was "better than nothing," *i.e.*, a good deal more inventive and intelligent than he was.

The park at Fernyhurst was a beautiful combination of forest and wild heathery ground, the knolls covered with picturesque twisted oak, brilliant hollies, and old thorns intermixed with fern, while groves of tall beech filled the hollows. On one of the open spaces was a bright breezy pool, and here with much trouble Tom had launched a small flat-

bottomed boat, built nominally by himself, *i.e.*, he had stood with his hands in his pockets diligently over his father's carpenters till it reached the painting stage, when it came out under his touch a bright blue picked out with scarlet, and May was brought down in triumph to the pool to christen it after herself. She was quite as much delighted and honoured by this as was expected of her, which is saying a great deal.

"It must be called the *Mayflower*, and we'll sail across to America, you know, Tom. Oh, we mustn't row, I'm sure the pilgrim fathers sailed," she said, anxious for the "local colouring."

"I've brought down the big red umbrella, and you must sit and hold it up as a sail; there, mind you hold tight," said her brother.

"What'll mamma say? It's the old French one that she's so particular about."

"It's the biggest in the house," said Tom.

He was as innocent as other schoolboys of all knowledge of pilgrim fathers, but one name was as good as another, besides which this offered the double advantage of including an attack upon the boat by Indians with spears, and then of its defence by himself, in a noble attitude, striding across the seats.

"I wonder whether Scrope will think much of it," said he, sitting down rather out of breath with his exertions. "I want papa to ask him; he's such a fine fellow, head of the Eleven. Yes, he has done pretty well in the schools; but it's the games he's so good at. The boys don't think much of a sap, but he's in the sixth form, so he can do as he pleases. I'm afraid he won't come."

"What, is he too grand?" said May, with some awe.

"Well, you know, we haven't any cricket here, and he's very near the head of the school, and a great swell, and there's nothing to amuse him."

"Why, surely there's shooting," put in May humbly.

"I don't know that the shooting is good enough, the governor preserves so badly," said Tom, with a sigh.

"But, dear, Lord William and Sir Charles Malcolm shot here when Hastings was at home, and they didn't seem to think it bad."

It might be all very well, however, for a county member and a general officer, but yet not for the head of the Eleven, in Tom's eyes. We talk of hero-worship being dead,—it is a perfect passion in the heart of many boys. The profound admiration

and reverence inspired by a successful boy at a great public school are very touching. There is nothing in after life, as Canning once said, which can be compared with the splendour of his position. No prime minister or successful soldier, no chancellor or archbishop, ever stands in such proud pre-eminence, or receives such loyal, enthusiastic, outspoken acknowledgment of his merits from his compeers. What was Lord Palmerston's feeling of exultation (though he had something of the school-boy element in him to the last) in carrying a close division, to that of the triumph of being "hoisted" after a match? Physically, perhaps, there may be some objection to lying on the uneasy shoulders of frantic supporters, while one's arms and legs are dragged violently in different directions by admirers half mad with victory, but then mentally what glory!

So Tom looked up to Scrope as a simple mortal might do to those demigods whose histories the schoolboy had learned so unwillingly; and he considered nothing good enough for so important a personage.

"Oh, papa, isn't it beautiful? Look, I'm the pilgrim fathers, just got to America, and Tom's the ferocious Indians!" screamed May, as the Squire rode up, looking tired with his five hours at a magis-

trate's meeting, part of that unpaid and unthanked work of which there is so much silently done in England. It was a pretty group, May sitting down in the boat under her red umbrella, Tom brandishing a long reed, the evening light behind the great trees reflected in the bright water, the grey horse and its rider, whose seat was so easy and yet so firm that they always looked as if they had grown together.

"I'm afraid my pilgrim fathers will go to the bottom; Tom, you must have a safer sail than that," said he, getting off. "Come and walk home with me, May; it's quite time for you to go in."

"And I may ride Nimrod when I've put up the boat," cried Tom.

"Papa, Tom wants you to ask Scrope; you'll let him ask Scrope?" said May eagerly, as she hung on to her father's arm.

"Who on earth is Scrope?" answered he, with a smile; "where does he come from? Tom's mouth is always full of Scrope. Who is his father, and where does he live?"

"He's a clergyman in the North somewhere, and he's got a great lot of children—I don't know anything more about him," put in Tom, who was now scrambling on to the horse; "but Scrope is head of the Eleven, papa; I'm sure you'd like him very much."

The fates, however, were adverse, and though the invitation was duly sent, the great man was destined not to honour Fernyhurst at this time with his presence.

“Did you finish what you had to do for Mr. Drayton, Tom?” said Mr. Dimsdale, turning a little sternly to the boy, who was beginning to ride off. “Do you hear what I say?” he called still louder; but Nimrod’s legs were long, and Tom was instinctively out of hearing.

“I wish that boy would use his head as well as his heels half an hour in the day,” muttered the Squire in an annoyed tone.

“Papa, Mr. Drayton said it didn’t so signify this last week of the holidays,” said May, standing timidly in the breach.

“That’s only because it is so utterly hopeless to get a stroke of work out of him—and it was exceedingly kind of Mr. Drayton to offer to read with him. I hope *you’ve* done what he desired you to get ready,” went on her father, vexed and angry—for May had been admitted to the honour of the lesson as Tom’s inseparable companion.

She did not answer, and Mr. Dimsdale put his hand under her chin, turned up her little face, and looked into it. “Did you do it, May?” persisted he.

"Yes, papa," she said, in the lowest possible tone, and flushing up to the roots of her hair, as it seemed to her a sort of disloyalty to Tom.

"And why couldn't he, I wonder?"

"Oh, papa, it's quite different. I like it, you know!" she cried anxiously.


"And why shouldn't he, I want to know?" But the pleading look in her eyes had carried the day, and Tom escaped further questioning for that evening at least.

The rector's offer had been a decided failure. Tom considered any such occupation in the holidays as a base inroad on the rights of boy, even when the day was too long for him; and if he was forced to open a book, he at least determined to learn nothing out of it. Under such discouragement even Mr. Drayton's patience gave way.

"I can't stand Master Tom any longer. I declare he's too bad," he said at last; "but I'll go on reading with you if you like, May," he added when he saw her disappointed face.

It was a great enjoyment to the fresh mind of the girl, and checked the excessively desultory character of almost all solitary reading. Mr. Drayton was not a pedant, but a well-read man, such as used often to be found in the most secluded parsonages. He read

history with her; he taught her some Latin, and a good deal of English, and what is to be found in English literature, to understand the beauty of style, of composition, to enjoy the splendid march of magnificent words in Milton and Gibbon, and the smart sharp-shooting of modern writing. A girl is so quick in apprehending the meaning of what she reads that she requires the accuracy and thoroughness of the best teaching even more than does a boy; whereas all the instruction which she generally receives is from some half-educated governess obliged to earn a living, who, having learned nothing well herself, takes to teaching because it is almost the only opening for a woman; while for our boys we obtain the cleverest men whom salary and position combined can secure. The head masters of Eton and Harrow are more highly paid than the Prime Minister, and are on the road to the most distinguished preferment in the Church. The Dons at Oxford and Cambridge are (at least in their own estimation) the greatest men on earth. Nothing is considered too good for a boy's education, nothing too bad for a girl's. And then the "inaccuracy" of women is talked of scornfully. How can it, for the most part, be otherwise?



CHAPTER II.

TOM'S HERO.

"Theirs buxom health, of rosy hue,
Wild wit, invention ever new,
And lively cheer, of vigour born;
The thoughtless day, the easy night,
The spirits pure, the slumbers light."
GRAY.

IT was between three and four years after, and Tom's first year at college. This step to manhood was a source of the greatest pride and delight to him, and he related his great deeds in glowing terms to May, whose enthusiastic interest was always ready for everything that he had to tell. Sometimes she appealed to him for help in her reading. Tom laughed unmercifully at her appetite for knowledge, quizzed her ineffectual struggles with Greek Testament and such like attempts. But he found it pleasant to be erected into an oracle, a kind of worship with which he, a younger son, little given to learning, was by no means oversated, and he did what he could for her in a grand and supercilious way.

"And then I've been reading the Hecuba and

the *Alcestis*," said he, winding up a rather magniloquent account of his performances, as he and May sat in the deep window-seat of the old nursery, which was now used only as a sort of retreat for her.

"Oh, how I should like to read those Greek plays! But I suppose I never shall learn enough for that," replied May, looking over his shoulder as he unpacked his books, with a carelessness for their corners which would have driven his father wild.

"My dear pusskin, how can you be so absurd?" cried Tom, with a laugh that might have been heard all over the house. "Why, the *Hecuba* is unmitigated 'bosh!'—all exclamations and rubbish; and the chorus says 'Ah' to *Hecuba*, and *Hecuba* says 'O popoi' to the chorus. There is no sense whatever in it. Now where's that bit I told you to do? Come back to your tenses; you've got *τυπτω* all wrong."

"Yes, I see. But, Tom, I couldn't understand this line, it's very beautiful, 'The moon is shining on the Trojan army;' and then comes that difficult bit."

"My dear, you've nothing to do with the beauty; just you stick to the grammar, that's all you've got to attend to," replied her mentor, much to her disappointment. May's taste, like that of most other girls, was farther advanced than her brother's. She was older for her age. She had the keenest pleasure in

the beauty of what she was reading, the charm of the descriptions, the harmony and rhythm of the poetry, while Tom was engrossed in the mechanism, in grammar not as a means to the understanding of a book, but as an end, *i.e.*, of class position or examination. Any enjoyment in the works themselves which they are reading is scarcely felt by one, indeed, in a hundred schoolboys; and even later in life, Byron's feeling towards "Horace, whom he hated so," seems to be shared by half the gentlemen of England, who have spent ten of the best years of their lives in learning little else.

"Just think," Tom went on in a few minutes, "I'm on the same stairs with Scrope; he's only been up a year; he broke his leg, and that stopped him two terms, and he's very little ahead of me."

Now though to ordinary mortals the University step in one's career is one full of honour and joy, yet for that great individual, the head of the Eleven, and in the upper sixth of a public school—who has reached, as it were, the pinnacle of human glory—there is nothing left in life but to come down. The sets at college are too numerous, the amusements too scattered, for any one man to have the general renown of schoolboy days, and, accordingly, Walter Scrope was many pegs lower in dignity than when

Tom had last known him at the awful distance of a lower boy, and he was admitted to the honour of intimacy in a way which surprised him. Scrope was a hard-working lad, a capital cricketer, and successful in scholarships and examinations, but he had begun to find out that the world was not quite the oyster, to open which had seemed to him once so easy. Rather to Tom's surprise, his Easter invitation to Fernyhurst was gladly accepted by his friend.

It would have been difficult to define May's idea of what a hero should be, but it certainly was a shock when Tom introduced him to them all in the Fernyhurst drawing-room, both very blue with a five miles' drive in a dog-cart, in a sharp March wind. The hero's hair inclined to be red, and his features were by no means finely cut; he was strongly made and big, without grace or charm of any kind, and his manner was rough and full of corners. May sat down with a sort of pang while the introductions were going on; the ideal had had a great blow, yet not to like Tom's friend was almost a crime in her eyes.

"Let her dine with us to-night; I want her, and it's Tom's first day," said her father.

"She's best in the school-room," answered her

mother. 'It was a debate which often took place, and, as was not usual, her father carried his way.

At dinner, to Tom's great surprise, Miss Cecilia engrossed Walter. There was a flying hail of University slang to begin with, but the lads were rather quiet, and Walter, in spite of his independent manner, was not insensible to the charm of something approaching to flirtation with a young lady older than himself; it is an honour—a boy always prefers a woman to a girl.

"You never told us that Mr. Scrope's father was a brother of Lord Ardmore," said Cecilia to Tom, when they met in the drawing-room after dinner.

"No, didn't I?" said he indifferently.

"So you did know it?"

"Know it! Oh yes, I knew it—what did it signify? You'll never see his governor, he lives ever so far down in the north."

And luckily no public schoolboy thinks that it "signifies" *who* a boy is. Tom had now, however, reached a place where this blessed ignorance does not long continue; at college, connections are by no means indifferent.

Miss Cecilia, too, considered that it "signified" a good deal; it was by no means worth her while to expend her ammunition on the very heterogeneous

material which her brothers brought to their father's house, but, in the absence of older game, she had no objection to keeping her hand in upon any one tolerably well born, though "only a boy;" and, to Tom's astonishment, his superfine sister relaxed, and played a neat little game of flirtation for the rest of the evening. There is nothing which delights a boy on the brink of manhood so much. A woman can draw out what is in him, suggest topics, feed his vanity, and satisfy his curiosity as to that interesting and unknown subject—the natural history of petticoats; and Walter hung about her all the evening, hovering over the piano, listening to her music, playing with her worsteds, and the like.

"Hercules and Omphale," said the erudite Tom, but in a very low whisper; he found himself quite cut out; not that this troubled either him or May in any way; she had established herself in the corner of the sofa on which he was extended, nestling to his side, as he pulled her long curly brown locks out of their blue net, while she listened with subdued peals of laughter (for her mother, half asleep, had remonstrated about the noise) to a fire of jokes from Tom, the newest slang, dashes of college life, and was getting up the whole language of elisions and allusions—"greats," "the vac," "the long," "scratch

fours," "ploughed for his smalls," and *id genus omne*. " 'Quadrangle,' my dear!" shouted he with horror, "you must say 'quad.'" Having just learned the tongue, he was naturally a purist; while his father, in an arm-chair not far off, was listening with a quiet smile on his face, nearly as much amused as his children.

"Did you ever hear such stuff, papa?" cried May at last.

"Never, my dear," replied he, drily; "we were strictly correct in our English in *my* day. *We* only said 'plucked for our little go.'"

Things went on in much the same way during the rest of Scrope's visit; except when the lads were out walking or riding together, Cecilia claimed and monopolised nearly all his attention.

At the end of their visit, however, Tom, with an unconscious respect for May's judgment, inquired rather anxiously how she liked his friend.

"Oh, very much," she answered, stretching her conscience a little; "he's very clever, you know, and all that, but, Tom dear, I've hardly spoken to him you see—he treats me like a little girl," she added, with the insulted dignity of sixteen "and-a-half." The half is the most valuable and important portion in the eyes of the possessor at her age.

"And pray what are you, I should like to know?" cried Tom, laughing. And there was no doubt of the painful fact, she looked like a little girl. She was short for her age, her clothes were made for use and not for show, and clothes have much to do with the impression of a "little girl." At this moment she was wearing an old gown of Cecilia's, a "razee," as Charlie the sailor called it. "Highty, Tightly, and Scrub" comprised her whole wardrobe, her brothers declared, and even that they were all "scrub."

That season Mrs. Dimsdale once more performed her pilgrimage to London; railroads as yet were only talked of, and she persuaded herself that the sacrifice was great in undergoing the weary journey. "Oh, you're sure to enjoy it—'The labour we delight in physics pain;' Hastings will look after you," said her husband as he put her into the carriage, having treacherously declared off at the last moment, and quite satisfied with his fate so long as she consented to leave May behind.

As a fruit of the effort, a marriage was soon after announced between Cecilia and a Colonel Seymour, a good deal older than herself, which had been hanging fire on both sides for some time.

He came down with them to Fernyhurst, and

May was considerably awed by the politeness of her mature brother-in-law, who was, however, exceedingly kind to her, and indeed testified a more ardent desire to see her at their house in Curzon Street than Cecilia quite endorsed.

The wedding was all that was proper in every respect; the Dimsdales were on the whole a well-grown, well-looking set, and were all collected for the occasion; and Tom appeared, followed by his friend.

"How pretty you look, May!" said her brother Charlie, who had obtained leave for a run home on the occasion, as she appeared in her bridesmaid gear. It was her first compliment, and valuable accordingly. "I've always seen you in the pitchfork style of dress, you know. Why don't you always wear those things?"

"What, white tarlatane in the morning!" laughed May; "what a man's idea!"

"A woman ought always to wear white," growled Walter; "it's the 'whole duty' of woman to be charming, and she fulfils that duty best in white."

May was extremely indignant at this irreverence, and showed it by refusing to speak to the delinquent during the rest of his visit; but he seemed provokingly unconscious of her wrath.

Mrs. Dimsdale sang a song of thankfulness that

her troubles of chaperoning were over, perhaps with a rather uneasy sense of unreality in her joy, when her husband hastily responded with, "You shall never be troubled with any duty of the kind with May, I'm quite resolved, my dear."

And now May, almost to her own surprise, found herself promoted to the post of young lady of the house, its dignities and responsibilities—no longer "a little girl." She did not, however, relish her grandeur, poor child, but was troubled by doubts whether she was up to all that her duties included, and lamented over Cecilia's loss in a way which her sister had not done much to deserve.

She had fewer of those pleasant times—half reverie, half reading—which had hitherto been her delight. "Missus wants you," or "Master's a shoutin' for ye, miss," was constantly invading her sanctuary in the old nursery, where, coiled up in an immense arm-chair, with a big book upon her knees, dreaming, thinking, preparing her work, some of her happiest hours had been spent. She was the darling of old "Nursey," the last of the large brood of chickens now left to the old woman, who still reigned in her deserted kingdom, holding sway over the linen generally of the family, and Master Tom's shirts in particular. She was the only person

of whom that worthy was afraid. She was a little woman, and Tom at least six feet high; but when she stood over him, as it were, by right of worth and moral superiority, as was the case one morning soon after his return home, and demanded, in serious tones, "But what's become of them two new shirts, Master Tom? I sent you off with twelve!" Tom almost trembled.

"She's worse than the flag-lieutenant," said Charlie, who was standing by during the ordeal, a little afraid that his own turn was coming, and with a conscience by no means void of offence on the subject of socks and silk handkerchiefs. "Holding a regular court-martial, May," he shouted to her as she went down the stairs; "making away with H.M.'s stores! Sentenced to be confined to his cabin for three weeks, and committed suicide in despair," he added, as he rode down astride upon the banisters like a whirlwind.

"Oh, Charlie, take care; how can you make such a noise? What will mamma say?" cried May, the infinite risk to his neck striking her far less than the fear of her mother's complaints of the disturbances which the boys made. Charlie's visits were always flying ones—come one day, gone the next, while his ship was in harbour or was paid off—and

her troubles of chaperoning were over, perhaps with a rather uneasy sense of unreality in her joy, when her husband hastily responded with, "You shall never be troubled with any duty of the kind with May, I'm quite resolved, my dear."

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a general saturnalia was always the consequence. May was at this time in the morning supposed to be practising on the piano in the drawing-room, wherein her studies were much assisted by her two brothers, who now followed her. in, chiefly, it is to be feared, because the drawing-room was forbidden ground.

"Well, Tom's lingo is much harder to get up than the Naval Cadet's examination," said Charlie, flinging himself, with a deep sigh, on the sofa after his exertions. "He's going in for Mods, and if he gets scratched for his Trial Torpids, he won't be ploughed for Smalls—that's right, isn't it, Tom?"

"Now, Charlie, you sat up all night to make that impromptu, you know you did," said Tom with a grin; "a man must speak like his neighbours——"

"A man!" shouted Charlie; "look at the 'man!'"

The moment was certainly unlucky. Tom was hopping steadily round the room, "taking his fences" very deliberately over all the furniture, a "bullfinch" over the sofas, a "rasper" over the chairs, and a "flat jump" over water, as represented by the rug.

Mrs. Dimsdale did not come down till late, and May's usually active little conscience had been hardened by repeated crimes undetected and un-

punished. She was now sitting laughing on a music-stool, with her back, alas! to the piano, when warning voices were heard in the distance.

Tom only escaped by a flying leap out of the window, while Charlie went out in a more dignified manner at the door, with his hands in his pockets, "close reefed for a gale," as he declared.

"What are you doing here, Charlie?" said his mother, rather sternly; "you know I want May to practise at this time in the morning."

"So she was just beginning, and we were helping her, mother. If she hadn't been very dull, she'd have learned the 'Ratcatcher's Daughter' before this, for Tom sang it, and I accompanied it on the Jew's harp. I'm sure you'd have liked it. It was awfully jolly, mother; such a pity you weren't there to hear!"

Charlie was supposed to be the only person who could manage his mother, which he did by always ignoring her anger, and treating her as if she greatly enjoyed and admired all that he did.

"If that is all that May's doing, I think she might as well have come back and written my notes for me," said Mrs. Dimsdale, with rather a vexed smile.

"Yes, mother, we'll all come and write the notes directly," said the boy, with his infectious good-

humour, tucking her arm under his own as he spoke. "Just a bit of good steering, you see," he whispered, laughing, to May as they all went off in peace.

May was in great request with them all. There is not often a more happy being in existence than the daughter at home in a Squire's family in the country: there is plenty to do both for mind and body, and of the pleasantest kind. If there are a number of girls to divide the work, it is perhaps scarcely enough to cut into many parts, and the modern cry for occupation may have a good deal of reason; but for a single one, like May, no position on earth can be more perfect. Her little feet went up and down the world busily as she helped her mother with her accounts and household management, read to her father, interested herself in the Alderneys and the draining, worked out under his orders his building plans and improvements, while, as she rode about amongst the farms and cottages with him, she was concerned in the joys and griefs, the wants and wishes, of almost every soul in that little kingdom, an English Squire's estate. Moreover, she was the recipient of each brother's requirements and confidante of his scrapes — of the laments that Tom might not have a horse, that papa would not pay for more promotion, or ask for Charlie's prolongation of leave, and generally

and particularly, and at all times, of the complaints over the shortness of their allowances. "The governor hasn't the slightest notion how much a man *must* spend," said the soldier, the sailor, and the lad at college alike, in every variety of tone, and with a richness of illustration known only to the boy mind. While May, riding with her father, who saw, with a sigh, the old oaks felling to supply such enlarging needs, sympathised as keenly with the other side of the question. She was much younger than her brothers, but, somehow, she was erected into their counsellor and their conscience, with an occasional sop to their own dignity, such as——

"You know, May, you *can't* tell anything about the matter; you're nothing but a girl." Or, "You're worse than a baby to say that. Why, I couldn't help it; it's perfectly out of the question for me to spend a halfpenny less!" Or, "Oh, bother! I won't have you scolding in this way. I was *quite* right in it all; I know I was."

But in the end the sense, the sympathy, and the ready wit held their own, and the brave little heart and sound little head won the day in a curious manner, for they were as unconscious as she was herself how much the cleverest she was of the family.

Her sympathies had hitherto been pretty equally balanced, but this year Hastings, the Guardsman, according to the agreeable habit of some eldest sons, had informed the Squire that his debts must be paid either by his father or the Jews.

Mr. Dimsdale, who, though hard driven, had never owed a fathing in his life, was obliged to borrow—of which he had a horror—and to retrench, which at his age was very trying.

“I’m sure,” said he, sighing, to his usual companion, May, as they were riding together, “it’s lucky that your mother can’t go to London this year. (You know that’s not what I mean. I’m sorry enough she’s not well.) And now old Blucher’s dead, we shall give up the four-in-hand. It’ll be something not to have those beasts eating their heads off in the stable any longer. She won’t like it at all I’m afraid, but I don’t believe she’s used them five times in the last six months. And there’s a horse of mine must go. I’m sure I don’t know how to make both ends meet this year—we never do more than keep out of debt—and there are Tom’s expenses double what they were. There must be another fall of timber in the Silent wood.” And he sighed again.

“Still take it for all in all, May, the comparative

good of keeping together the land with the head of the family in England, as contrasted to the continual subdivision in France" And he consoled himself by a philosophical disquisition upon the advantages and disadvantages, which May hardly understood or listened to, while her young face flushed, and her heart felt sore and angry for her father, though she said nothing, as they rode on under the lofty trees, the sun gleaming through the green leaves, and the interlacing of the great boughs, on the fern beneath, as he stopped from time to time to mark the finest of the timber.

CHAPTER III.

ARGUING.

"You will then seek only the good, would scorn the attractive?"

Ah, you have much to learn, we can't know all things at twenty.
Partly you rest on truth, old truth, the truth of duty."

CLOUGH.

MR. DRAYTON, the rector, was beginning, like his friend, to grow old. He did not object to the fact itself—his pleasant, homely, genial spirit found neither books nor men pall upon him, and he had the pleasure and interest of his friend's children without his fatherly anxieties; but to one consequence he did demur—murmur, indeed, if so hard a word existed in his vocabulary. His sister "thought it her duty" to come and stay very frequently with him; and if there be anything very convenient to oneself and very unpleasant to others to be done, it is astonishing how useful "one's duty" becomes to some people. She had lately been left a widow with one daughter, who always, of course, accompanied her; and the poor old rector found life severe under the infliction. He was a kindly man, disposed to

take a lenient view of divers aberrations which even then were beginning to show themselves in the Church, while Mrs. Longmore and her daughter were most strict in their orthodoxy. Their home was in the cathedral town not far off, where her husband had held some small preferment, and where "my uncle the canon" still ruled, greatly to the discomfiture of the unlucky mortals against whom that "gun ecclesiastical" was discharged continually by his lady relatives.

The pleasant Rectory, just without the park paling, and with all the pleasure of its grounds, was a very enjoyable change from the cathedral close in hot weather; and Mrs. Longmore's "duty" to her brother became imperative many times this summer. It was not more than a mile from the great house, where, of course, the doors were always open to anything which belonged to Mr. Drayton; there was a perpetual passing to and fro of the inmates; and though the Longmores were not popular at Fernyhurst, yet a young lady is a young lady anyhow, and the boys amused themselves with Sophia when there was nothing better to be had.

She had "looked in" one day early, as usual, not altogether to May's satisfaction at the incursion, which had taken place twice already that week.

She did not exactly dislike her ; they were on that rather doubtful and difficult footing, "old friends," but the visit broke up the morning mercilessly. There is a certain kind of chatter, which, as there is no reason for either beginning or end, seems as if it might go on to eternity.

"Whose is that book?" said she at last, taking up one which lay open on the table.

"Mine," answered Walter laconically.

"I'm surprised to see such a work here ; it is very unsound," said Miss Sophia, aged seventeen, who, as a canon's niece, thought it incumbent on her to take orthodoxy under her protection.

"How distressed the Dean of —— will be to hear that you think so!" observed Walter, gravely, but with a fantastic sort of grimace which came over his face when he was annoyed. "Is it principally with his historical facts, or the philosophical deductions from them, that you chiefly disagree, Miss Sophia?"

Sophia never could understand Mr. Scrope ; she had not the faintest ray of intelligence of a joke, but she had a dim perception that Walter was laughing at her, and she therefore made her adieux and went out of the room "d'un air capable," as if she had rather distinguished herself.

"By all the powers!" shouted Walter as soon as

she was out of hearing, marching up and down with his hands deep in his pockets, "isn't it the very coxcombery of absurdity? One wouldn't mind if it weren't a type of what's going on in the world. The chits, male and female, who can't spell the very words in which the giant expresses himself, and then puff themselves out like frogs, and say it is 'not sound,'" he went on, somewhat grandiloquently.

"Well, but," said May, a little annoyed both at and for Sophia, "the Dean *is* a heretic surely. Dr. Atkins says that — —"

"Heretic is from *αἰρέω*, to choose," answered Walter, sententiously: "and to choose in matters of opinion is the faculty which distinguishes a man from a beast."

"And if he chooses wrong?" said May, shortly.

"You may happen to stand still wrong, if you think choice wrong," replied he. "If Luther had been afraid of *αἵρεσις*, of examination, of choice, you who think choice wrong would have been a Roman Catholic to this day, Miss May. Free thought!" said the young fellow, throwing out his arms to their full extent, a sort of compromise between an enthusiasm and a stretch, in his boyish fear of the ridicule of much feeling, "to fancy free thinker being a term of reproach—the finest thing that a man can do!"

"You're not admiring Tom Paine & Company, I suppose?" observed May, a little superciliously.

"How you two always will misunderstand each other! you know he doesn't mean that," said Tom the peacemaker. "I can't think how it is you quarrel about everything."

"Women like their clothes and their opinions orthodox," went on Walter, without attending to him; "and if any one says that their bonnet is ugly, or their opinion is against every fact of history and philosophy, they think it's quite a satisfactory answer to say that Madame Thingummy made the one, and that Dr. Bumble holds the other; they delight in Popes!"

May opened her mouth to reply in wrath, but her father's voice was heard in the hall calling her, and she went off to him at once.

"I wish every woman was made to read logic. I would have every girl of them drummed through a chapter of Mill every morning," said Walter, rather savagely, as she left the room.

"Hear him!" laughed Tom; "the great cynic, who declared it 'the whole duty' of woman to be charming, and to dress in white in the morning, not a year back! The want of logic can no farther go!"

"Consistent! No, to be sure I'm not! I'm learning.

What are we put into the world for, I wonder, but to learn? Because I talked nonsense when I was twenty, do you mean I'm to go on keeping to it like a fool till I'm sixty, in order to be what you think consistent?"

And Walter laughed rather angrily, for the example of his old thesis, the concrete essence of his former proposition, appeared fair and living at the door: Cecilia herself came sailing in, fulfilling to the full the whole duty of woman in one sense, her gown perfect in colour, fashion, and fit, the face and figure it contained almost as good as the gown, *pim-pante*, *avenante*, *prévenante*—there are no English words to express her—charming down to the tips of her fingers, and quite ready to be charming to him.

He did not like her—now—gave an impatient snort and an unintelligible reply to the playful nothing which she threw at him as she passed, and went a little roughly out of the room.

"What makes Mr. Scrope such a bear this morning?" said she wonderingly. "Colonel Seymour says that he's thought very clever, but so odd that he never will do anything."

"Do anything" means succeed in life in the Cecilian vocabulary. Walter was doing a great deal for himself and for others. He was learning, as he

said, but it was in an uncouth slow way; his was what would be called in a certain kind of slang "a big inarticulate soul." He had a large heart and a large brain, but he could not express his meaning either by word or action; he was full of corners, rubbed everybody the wrong way, so that few people liked to act with him, and his rugged talk produced antagonism instead of assent. He had little imagination, and could not place himself mentally in the place of others and see their difficulties, or consequently explain his own. It is a suffering temperament—

"As it is, I live and die unheard
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword."

He was reading for a fellowship, on which he intended to live while working hard at his law in London. His father's fortune was so small that he did not choose to take any help at his hands, and he led a very ascetic life, coming down occasionally to Fernyhurst as one of his few pleasures.

"How wet and tired Mr. Scrope looks, and, Tom, you're quite dry," said May, on one of these occasions, as they came into the house from their journey down from London on a wretched winter's evening.

"Wet! No wonder, stupid fellow! He chose to get outside the coach in this pelting rain, because

we took up a woman in a thin gown, and no cloak to speak of, and he gave up his place inside to her. I had the pleasure of her company as my neighbour all the way to Danesbury ‘all along of’ him,” said Tom.

“That fat old wretch would keep the window up on my side. I was sitting back, and it made me sick,” growled Walter as he went out of the room, looking annoyed.

“Oh! so that was the reason you got out, was it? It was all an abominable piece of self-indulgence!” shouted Tom after him.

“What kind of woman was it?” said May, curiously, after he was gone.

“A sort of a kind of old maid-servant, I should think by her looks,” answered her brother.

CHAPTER IV.

COMING HOME.

“How like a winter hath mine absence been.”

SHAKESPEARE'S *Sonnet*.

“SO Lionel landed on Tuesday, I hear from Brickwall,” said Mrs. Dimsdale, one morning at breakfast, as she opened a letter from her sister. “I’m glad that she has got her son home safe at last, after all these years.”

“Yes, Clara and Amy have been in such a way about him,” observed May; “they thought the ship must have gone down, the Cape Mail was so late, and they were so long without hearing anything from him.”

“Stuff and nonsense,” cried Tom; “why should that ship go down more than any other, I should like to know?”

“I’m glad it did not happen to be this one, however,” answered his father, with a smile. “You’ll write and ask him here, my dear?” he went on, turning to his wife. “I should like to hear a little

about the Cape, and I used to like the lad, though he has been gone so long that one has nearly forgotten him."

"And tell the girls that he must make haste and come before my time at home is over," ordered Tom of his sister.

Lionel Wilmot was the son of a general officer of small estate, about thirty miles from Fernyhurst, who had married Mrs. Dimsdale's sister late in life after seeing a great deal of service, and receiving a spent ball on the head, which had sunk his later years into an uneventful invalid existence, leaving a very large scope to his wife's energies, which were great. He had lately died, and his soldier son, having been away with his regiment, with but one short interval, for the last six or seven years, was now returning to put his father's affairs in order, and arrange matters for his mother and two young sisters. He had always shown himself an exceedingly good son and brother, and had provisionally done everything in his power for their comfort from a distance; but he had been away so long that he seemed almost like a stranger, and his return was of course a great event to his family.

Brickwall, his patrimony, was the very pink of propriety—an old red-brick house, with stone quoins

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and small balustrades, in a proper little park, standing on a tidy little hill, with the church close behind on one side, and a capital square kitchen-garden wall on the other—it was surrounded by a number of good trees, not, however, large enough to be fine, which would have been out of keeping.

May had always felt inclined to gape as soon as the first of its neat iron fences broke upon her view. As a child, her visits had been a terror to her aunt, for she led her two orderly little cousins into all sorts of iniquities; they dirtied and tore more frocks in the few days of her stay than in the whole course of the year besides. May was dreadfully inventive and active: out of doors she made dams and water-mills in the stream, and indoors built up half the schoolroom furniture into “houses,” to the horror of the governess. She was found one day declaiming to them the passionate love passages in *Romeo and Juliet*, of which the music and the images had struck her fancy, though the meaning was far beyond her. Another time it was “One more Unfortunate” which some one had read before her out of a magazine: whole cantos of Walter Scott, scraps of Spenser, with absurd bits from Charlie’s songs and Tom’s Pickwickian extracts, came pouring out in wonderful juxtaposition. Altogether, the result was much more

entertaining than Pinnock's Catechism and Cowper's Poems, which was the diet on which the girls were usually fed, and they worshipped her, to their mother's extreme distaste. Lionel had been away so long that May only remembered him as a tall lad who used to tease her and insult her dignity by calling her a tomboy.

"How very good-looking Lionel is!" said Mrs. Dimsdale one evening a day or two after her nephew's arrival at Fernyhurst, when he had left the room to fetch some bulbs which he had brought home for her from the Cape.

"And he has got as good a head on his shoulders as I have met with for some time," observed his uncle. "He has told me more about the difficulties of the Dutch and English law in dealing with the Kaffirs and settlers than I ever knew before."

"And he shoots as straight as any man in or out of England," went on Tom, with considerable respect for a tall cousin who had seen so much of the world.

"Good night, Lionel," said May, taking the candle which he had lighted for her, and shaking hands in very cousinly fashion at the door which he had opened.

"Did you generally do the civil like that in the wigwams at the Kaffir dinner-parties, Lionel?" Tom

called out with a smile from the bottom of the arm-chair in which he was ensconced.

As May went up-stairs she also observed to herself how agreeable he was ; how much pleasanter than Walter Scrope. He never asked her, when she disposed of a question by some pretty poetic platitude, whether it was true or not ; or declared that no amount of lofty sentiments could make two and two into five. He listened to her ; he did not always by any means agree with her, which would have been dull, but he gave her argument its very fullest value, and even sometimes put it into better shape for her.

“Whereas Mr. Scrope knocks people down and treads on them afterwards,” she said musingly to herself. “I don’t like talking to Walter, he’s very overbearing,” she went on, almost aloud, as the contrast came before her, and she stopped on the landing of the dark polished old oak staircase in the energy of her distaste.

CHAPTER V.

VERY CROSS.

"He is too disputable for my company. I think of as many things as he, but I give heaven thanks and make no boast of them."

As You Like It.

LIONEL WILMOT had come back to England and English society with extreme zest, after his long fast; everything and everybody was interesting to him, and his uncle's house especially so.

May had been only a child when he went away, and it was very piquant to make acquaintance with the young lady so pretty and so clever, with a brother's advantages and yet without a brother's familiarity, to be able to say "brotherly things in a very unbrotherly way." There was a sort of unwritten law in the family by which cousin marriages were forbidden as wrong and undesirable, and May took him very simply on the footing of her brothers. She was so accustomed to men's society that she was neither shy nor prudish nor forward with them. If men and women indeed meet naturally and constantly

with occupations in common, and not only in dress coats and evening gowns with wreaths on their heads, the manner between them settles itself easily enough.

Lionel had been in command of a large district up country at the Cape ; he had seen a good deal of hard service against the Kaffirs, and his uncle and Tom were always calling upon him for accounts of hair-breadth escapes and bits of fighting experience ; and such things to hear do Desdemonas often seriously incline.

"The Kaffirs had burned a farm belonging to a Boer," he was telling one day, "and we were sent in pursuit. We scoured the whole neighbourhood, but there was not a black skin to be found within miles. At last we made a fire, and were sitting down to get some food, when suddenly a naked savage came out on the bare plain, though you'd have sworn the scrub wasn't high enough to hide a hare, and grinned as he aimed his gun at me ; I was only just in time for him."

"And you killed him !" said May, rather reproachfully.

"Why, that's what the troop was there for. It was neck or nothing," put in Tom, rather scornfully.

"It's very horrid, though, to think of killing

even savage men in that way, like beasts," mused May. "After all, they were only defending their country against you."

Lionel turned quickly to her. "It's very true; but when you see a naked savage ramping along the ground like a serpent, you come at last to look upon him merely as a dangerous beast of preternatural sagacity, not at all as a man. But I don't defend it," he added with a smile. "One's Christianity wants rubbing up as well as one's manners when one gets home."

"I dare say the Romans hunted and improved us off the face of the earth much after the same fashion, and were quite proud of it afterwards," said the Squire, thoughtfully.

"And then the soldiers sometimes grew perfectly furious and couldn't be held in. One day five of our men had been sent across a track, so bare even of grass that it seemed as if a partridge couldn't have hidden there. They found nothing, and were coming back the way they went, when three or four hundred Kaffirs sprang up, through the midst of whom they must have passed. They were five to many hundred, and were cut to pieces. We came up just too late, and you may fancy there wasn't much mercy shown."

"Well, when Macaulay's New Zealander comes to write history, there'll be some queer things told by the other side, I fancy," said May.

"No, I haven't read what Macaulay says, and I don't know about the New Zealander," answered Lionel, laughing and shaking his head. "Very few books came up the pass to ——. I'm terribly ignorant, May, I'm afraid, about such things. Give me the book; I'll do my best to read and understand it now at all events, but you'll all think me very stupid."

There was a manly humility about the young soldier, which was very engaging in a man who had seen and done so much in life.

He was on his second visit to Fernyhurst, when one morning before luncheon they were all busily engaged in the old library, the round table covered with plans and sketches, at which May sat making drawings, according to orders, for a new cottage which Lionel wished to build at Brickwall. Her father stood over her on one side, giving his experience and his hints with the greatest interest; while Lionel on the other was doing his best to answer his uncle's difficult questions, and to be up to the mark in his new position of landed proprietor. "Price of bricks? I'm afraid I can't tell. Carpenter's wages? I must

write and inquire." And Tom, lounging over the *Times*, contributed his valuable assistance from time to time in an undertone not intended for his father—"Say a pound a day; he must be worth ten corporals, Lionel." "You'd better look well after May, or she'll be leaving out the staircase in the plan," and so on; when on this group, so occupied, Walter Scrope was suddenly introduced. He had been asked to Fernyhurst by Tom in the course of a walking tour, but there was a sort of blank when he entered the room, which even those who are really welcome always occasion when they interrupt a good morning's work.

After the first greetings Mr. Dimsdale retired into the shelter of his own room, with a formidable-looking Blue Book under his arm.

"Philanthropy in her very best pelisse and pantoufles to be sure!" said Walter, rather superciliously, as he stood with his hands in his pockets watching May, who had returned to her drawing, and was discussing the cottage once more with Lionel.

"Shall I put a finial on the gable or not, in spite of the estimate?" said she.

"Æsthetic with a vengeance," observed Walter. "Will all those smartnesses make the kitchen a bit more comfortable for the people?"

“But there isn’t any particular virtue in ugliness, surely,” remonstrated Lionel; “the finials and all will not make the cottage cost five pounds more, and it will be seen on three sides from the road.”

“Seen!” said Walter. “What does it signify how it looks?”

“And why on earth shouldn’t it look pretty if it can, I should like to know, you contradictory old cynic?” put in Tom. “There’s the gong sounding, luckily, and I hear my mother on the stairs—luncheon has charms to soothe the savage soul.”

But even the mollifying influence of food seemed lost upon Walter in his present mood, and in a few minutes he broke out in a fresh place.

“Where is your father, May? isn’t he coming in?” asked Mrs. Dimsdale, who was being waited upon diligently by the whole party, including Walter.

“He says he must go over to Brereton almost directly, mamma, for the Poor-Law meeting,” answered May.

“It’s very strange to hear all these troubles about able-bodied paupers when one’s just been listening to the clamour for labourers out at the Cape,” said Lionel. “Why don’t people give lectures to the working-classes about the colonies?”

"I wonder what people mean by the working-classes," grumbled Walter from the other end of the table. "I'm one of them, I hope. All this preaching and teaching is very fine, I dare say, and we're no doubt much obliged, but I fancy we should as lief be let alone."

"Surely there's no harm for anybody to learn about emigration or anything else; we can't all brew our own wisdom at home," said Lionel, smiling good-naturedly, as he carelessly poured out a glass of his uncle's home-brewed.

Walter muttered something about "spoiling good beer in that fashion," as he frothed his own portion scientifically.

"What will you do this afternoon, Scrope?" interposed Tom. "My father said he would ride with Lionel; will you have a horse too?"

"I've got two good legs given me by nature to walk with, and *I* wasn't born to four horses," growled he.

"Humble toddler!" said Tom with much pathos, "but I didn't offer Diogenes four horses, only an old pony."

Walter smiled grimly at himself. "I'll take a walk with you, if you'll come with me," said he, more graciously; and they went off, Tom murmuring,

“That sweet passage (Shakespeare, you know, Scrope) about the two lions roaring upon Afric’s torrid shore, and I think I remember that ‘the first lion thought the next a bore.’”

The visit was by no means a success. Walter was annoyed at Lionel’s presence; it disarranged all his habits. Tom’s allegiance belonged to him, as it were, by rights of old school days; and although he and May always quarrelled, yet her undivided attention had generally been his, if only to defend the fortress of her opinion. Now another seemed to rule in his stead in his old haunts, and he was hurt in his affections, though it looked a little as if it were only in his temper, and he was exceedingly cross.

Lionel was a good deal puzzled at the way in which his attempts at friendliness were taken, and the short answers he received. In truth, Walter’s manners were anything but agreeable, and on the second day he went away, rather to the relief of all; making some excuse about the necessity of finishing his reading.

“Mr. Scrope was quite savage. I can’t think what was the matter with him; he always looked as if he were going to bite,” said Lionel.

“A guisa de leon quando si posa,” said May, rather grandly, who was reading Dante.

“Like the yard-dog when he wants to fly at you,” muttered Tom, who was not poetical. “Cynic, from *kun, kunos*, ‘a dog,’” he added, with so good an imitation of Walter’s manner that they both burst out laughing.

“Ah, he mayn’t have been very pretty behaved, but he’s worth twenty of you put together, for all that,” said the good Tom, staunch in his allegiance. He would let no one laugh at his friend but himself.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNFORTUNATE QUESTION.

“Flowers are lovely, love is flower-like,
Friendship is a sheltering tree;
O the joys that came down shower-like,
Of friendship, love, and liberty,
When I was young!” COLERIDGE.

WALTER came back again in the autumn, having apparently recovered his temper. He had begun to read law very diligently in London, where he lived upon the small fellowship which he had just obtained, and was only too glad to come down as often as he could to Fernyhurst, which new railroads had now made more accessible.

They were all arguing again together as diligently as ever the next morning. It had been raining fast, and he and Tom sat waiting till it was fine enough to go out shooting, lingering round the breakfast table, with the snowy whiteness of its “napery,” the bright china, the silver embossed coffee and tea services, all the pretty, gay-looking accompaniments of that pleasantest of English meals, set out near the bow of the south room, cheerful even in the dullest weather.

"I'm too democratic!" cried Walter. "What do you mean? Every man has as much a right to govern himself as you have, of whatever rank, only he ought to be educated; and he'll get his right too, you'll see, in very little time."

"You'd better go and live in America," said conservative Tom. "I declare you are only fit for over the water."

"And why shouldn't I, I want to know? It must be a fine thing to live in a country where there are no poor except by their own faults. I mean to go there before I die."

"To settle?" said May, sarcastically.

"When everything else fails in England," he answered, a little bitterly. "It'll hurt nobody. Nobody'll care. Why shouldn't I?"

"The Yankees are so cocksure that they're wiser than the whole old world put together. As if nobody had ever known anything before they were born. I can't bear 'em," cried Tom.

"Oh, you go in for the wisdom of our ancestors? It makes one savage to hear you. I'm sure the world has been wasting its time horribly if it isn't wiser now than it ever was before. What has it been doing all this while, I should like to know?"

"The mere act of doing a thing often, teaches a man or a nation a great deal," replied Tom.

"Not a bit. A man has put on his stockings every morning, let us say; that's twenty-five thousand times when he comes to be near seventy, leaving out the days when he was too sick or too little to put them on for himself; then he thinks there can't be any better stockings than his, and prosés on to anybody who wants to improve them about the wisdom of his ancestors! I'm all for the wisdom of posterity—putting the golden age in the future, and forgetting the past as quick as possible."

"Would you pull down the foundation to build the house better? I think we want both. But '*si jeunesse savait, et si vieillesse pouvait*,' says the old French peasant," observed the Squire quietly, as he went out of the room to respond to the continual request, "There's some one waiting to see you, sir."

"Just look at those Italian and French democrats, always pulling down!" said Tom scornfully. "I caught May crying over '*Silvio Pellico*' yesterday. I can't think how you could be taken in by such a book."

"The Italian liberals were not democrats in the least, Tom, anyhow."

"The Italians haven't succeeded because they

didn't deserve success. They were romantic, and had no common sense about their revolutions," went on Tom without attending, and with an English "boy's" contempt for "foreigners."

"I can't bear to hear people talk in that way," cried May. "Success is such a low gauge."

"A cause always succeeds if it really is a good cause, you may depend on that," replied Tom dogmatically.

"'Treason, they say, ne'er prospers. More's the reason;
For when it does, no man dares call it treason,'"

said Walter.

"You must have common sense about revolutions as about everything else; you'll allow that, Scrope, I suppose?"

"Uncommon sense perhaps is what's wanted," retorted Walter. "I believe that clever men do succeed if they care enough about a thing to take all the means necessary; but sometimes they're dirty ones, and there are often things dearer to them than success; their conscience, or their independence, or their opinion, and then they don't succeed," said he, thinking only partly of the Italians. "Very fine fellows fail sometimes," he added with something like a sigh.

"I don't understand what you mean," argued Tom stubbornly. "Our revolution came right because

we knew what we wanted and fought till we got it. The Italians go mooning on, singing about liberty."

May understood perfectly; but though she did not like assistance from Walter Scrope's quarter, she could not help herself in the energy of her interest in the argument.

"The Reformation in Spain and Italy, for instance. Would you say purity of doctrine was good in England for it succeeded, and bad with them because it failed?"

"Nothing succeeds in the world like success," May could not help putting in.

"Job the just might have died on his dunghill (and often does, for that matter), and you'd hardly say that therefore he wasn't just. Why, there would never be a great deed done in the world if you were always to weigh what you do by common sense—neither martyrs nor heroes—men from Socrates downwards have risked all that common sense holds dear. Would common sense send you on a forlorn hope, I wonder?"

"Or make Sir John Eliot die in a dungeon? Why, he had his children and estate to look after."

"What do you say to Hannibal?" said Walter. "Was Carthage wrong because she came to a bad end?"

“Or John Huss?” followed up May eagerly.

“Little things and big alike. Suppose Sir Robert Peel saw a child fall into the river, and nobody near, common sense would say, ‘Your life is very valuable, and there are heaps more dirty children in the world; you can’t swim well, and you’ll certainly catch cold.’ But if he stood on the shore and stretched out his umbrella, and let the child drown, Tom might say it was very sensible; but he’d add a very uncomfortable epithet, I fancy.”

“What a hailstorm!” said Tom, who was lying back in his chair with his eyes shut, and now just opened the corner of one. “I’m quite dead; don’t kill me any more! I’ll agree to everything you have said, will say, or can say, ‘in secula seculorum.’”

“Tom’s a Sadducee, and doesn’t believe in heroes,” observed Walter, with a smile.

“I’m not so sure of that, old fellow,” answered he, looking affectionately at him. “And now let us mind our own business. It has done raining; and there’s the keeper. My father says he won’t go out shooting with us to-day.”

Towards evening May, having been busy all day, was taking her pastime sitting on the floor, reading by the firelight in the drawing-room. Great logs had just been heaped on, and the flickering flame

was glancing on the folds of red curtain, the panelled ceiling, and the Sir Joshua on the wall opposite, making all look very warm, genial, and pleasant. She had just got the last number of Dickens, which then supplied the place of the five-and-twenty periodical stories which we are now confusing in our heads, with a desperate uncertainty whether Miss Y——'s most virtuous lady is breaking her heart for Miss B——'s exceedingly disreputable gentleman, and who is the lady whom you "can" or cannot "forgive."

May had fully made herself comfortable in her favourite position when she heard the parting guns of the shooters firing away their last charges as they came near the house, and presently Walter, in his "stocking-feet"—for Mrs. Dimsdale was known to be stern in her regard for her carpets—came into the room.

"Tom has slipped into the Deep Dene pool, going after a wild duck, and is wet through, so he's gone up to dress," said he, approaching the fire.

"What have you done? have you had a good day?" said May, looking up. She felt bound to show some interest, but was in a great hurry to get back to her book, and secretly a little wished that Walter had been wet through as well as her brother.

“Only a teal—the duck got away after all—two snipe, and some odds and ends,” said he indifferently, as he leant his head against the mantelpiece, and looked down on the fire and the half-lit figure, in its careless grace, which knelt beside it.

May’s head was full of her story, and she was considering how soon politeness would allow her to return to the woes of Florence Dombey, when Walter, in a changed voice, began—

“May—Miss Dimsdale—I want to ask you a question.”

She was startled at his tone, and looked up a little anxiously, but without any idea of what he was intending.

“May, I want you to come and help me in London; there’s a great deal of grand work to be done there among the people, work which I can’t do without a wife,” he said, shortly. “There are things you would understand about them, and which only a woman knows. We could work together, I’m sure, very usefully, and” (as if it were rather an extra in the compact) “you must know what an affection I have for you.”

She sprang from the ground very much frightened. “Oh no,” she said hurriedly, “I don’t think we’re suited one bit; it wouldn’t answer at all, I’m

sure. Such a thing never even came into my head," she added, ruefully. "You're not serious?"

He did not answer.

"I'm so grieved," she said, sorrowfully; "I hadn't the least idea that you could misunderstand me. I thought we were always quarrelling, as Tom said."

"No, I didn't misunderstand you, I misunderstood myself. I never looked before my nose to see what the quarrelling meant—that it was because I couldn't bear you to be of a different opinion from me about anything."

And he crossed his arms on the mantelpiece, and laid his head upon them, as he looked into the fire again dismally.

"Miss Dimsdale," he suddenly blurted out, "wouldn't it be possible—should you mind—couldn't we go on as before, without saying anything of this mistake to anybody? Not that I care who knows, but things would be so much easier—and if you didn't mind my coming on here—I shan't trouble you, and—I care for you all very much," said he, with a break in his voice, cynic as Tom called him.

"I was just thinking so," answered May, thoughtfully; "I'm sure I don't see why anybody should

know. It would pain Tom very much, and do no good, and my dear father hates that sort of talk, you know ; he's always bored and annoyed about such things. We might go on quarrelling again, just the same as of old," she said with a laugh, as she glanced up at him. It was evident not only that she was heartwhole herself, but that she did not believe in his hurt being great.

He left the room as suddenly as he had come in, but she could not go on with her book.

"He's very excellent, and very clever, and all that kind of thing, I dare say," she said to herself, as she sat with her hand over her eyes, "but *that* isn't love a bit." She had not troubled her head much about such matters, but she had an ideal, like other folk, on the subject, and neither the man nor the wooing fulfilled it in any way. How could he make such a blunder? It was very tiresome and stupid of him, and must, more or less, spoil the ease of their intercourse ; but still, there could be no farther misunderstanding now about the matter, which was perhaps a good thing, and she was only too glad to put the whole question aside in her mind as settled and done for, and best forgotten altogether.

CHAPTER VII.

A DANCING TEA.

"Quips and cranks and youthful wiles,
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles,
Sport that wrinkled care derides,
And laughter holding both his sides."

L'Allegro.

CHARLIE had just been appointed a lieutenant, and appeared at Fernyhurst on leave a few days after, not full of the glories of advancement, as the uninitiated would imagine, but beset with grievances, to which he was a good deal addicted, in spite of his high spirits. It is the normal state, indeed, of the British sailor; it is almost a point of honour with him not to be satisfied; he cannot "get his promotion," or, if he has, he does not "get a ship," or it is the wrong ship, not so big or not so fast as somebody else's, and his woes are a perennial fountain of bitterness. He was now recounting these at the utmost length to May, as he lay in a great chair very comfortably one morning in her sanctum of the

nursery, while she was doing the house accounts for her mother.

"It's quite abominable of the Admiral," he repeated for at least the twentieth time; "he hasn't said a word about taking me as his flag-lieutenant, and if one's own uncle won't do anything for one! And then there is papa who won't ask the First Lord for anything. Why, he ought to sit on the Admiralty steps till they give me a ship!" Which, as the Admiral had at present no command, and his father had worked every possible engine to get him his promotion, was perhaps a little unjust.

Presently the door opened, and three of their eldest sister's children, who were staying in the house, came rushing in.

"Aunt May, grandmamma says she doesn't want us any more, and we're to come to you to do our lessons, and you are to go down to her d'rectly and speak to the schoolmistress about the girls' darning, she's not to wait in the lobby," shouted Hugh, peremptorily, greatly enjoying his contradictory messages.

When May at last returned, she found Charlie lying on the ground whistling a hornpipe, while his nephews and niece tumbled over him as lawful prize.

"It's exceedingly hard that I never get any dancing at home," said he, dolefully, as she came in.

“Another grievance,” observed May, smiling.

“Well, it *is* a shame; everybody else has balls at home excepting us; it’s a great deal too bad. Now don’t you laugh, May; you’d like a dance as well as anybody.”

“Yes,” she answered, “it would be very pleasant, but I don’t believe mamma would stand the fuss, and then there are no girls about here. There never was such a bad neighbourhood as ours” (a social fact which is always curiously agreed in everywhere); and she began to run over it on her fingers—“Tracy’s, no children at all; Evans’, two boys. . . .”

“My dear May, what are you talking about? no girls!” and in the interest of the question he rose bolt upright, scattering the babies like chaff, the youngest of whom began to howl. “No girls!” he went on excitedly, without attending to the wounded in the action, while May took the sufferer on her knee, and began to soothe the injured elbow and feelings. “Why, there are six of the Hounslows at the very least.”

“They’re ten miles off, and we don’t visit them.”

“They won’t mind that, they’ll come fast enough. Cissy, come to me again,” he said, holding out his arms to that young lady; “the elbow is quite well now, isn’t it?” and the ungrateful baby forsook the

steady friendship of her aunt, and went over to Charlie's uncertain mercies, unmindful of his crimes, and remembering only delightful tosses in the air.

"Incipient good taste,—likes gentlemen best already," observed he as he took her up.

"Stronger arms, that's all," said May, smiling.

"But I'm not going to be driven off the scent in that way. There are heaps of girls; Cissy, give me your fat pud," and he began to count up his list on the little fingers, which Cissy solemnly considered as a new and interesting game. "Six Hounslovs; two Barlows——"

"If you call them girls, they're forty at least," said she, rather disdainfully.

"Girls or not girls, they were dancing merrily at Winmouth in June, for I saw them. Sophia Longmore——"

"The Longmores don't think it right to go to balls, you know."

"My dear May, how innocent you are! Don't you know there are balls and balls? They don't think it right to dance at Mrs. Brown, Jones, and Robinsons', but they do at Lady St. Maur's. I know a man who met them there. A countess is different from a Brown, my dear young sister."

"But papa is not a count," laughed May.

“No, but he is king at Fernyhurst, which is nearly as good. Don’t call it a ball, but a children’s party, or a dancing tea, or a garden supper” (“In December,” suggested May), “and you’ll see if they don’t come, and she’ll dance all the evening too; ‘old friendship,’ you know, ‘don’t like to distress,’ you understand. Besides, a children’s party will be earlier, and that’d suit my mother, and it’s much better fun too, people are much jollier. And as to the trouble, Tom and I can turn up the carpet in the dining-room, and you can play, and we’ll have the two girls from the dockyard, and Lionel will bring Amy and Clara, and Tom’s good for half-a-dozen of his men, I’m sure, and I can get any number of mids.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid about you boys,” said May irreverently, “there’ll be plenty of *you*.”

“I’ll run down directly and manage my mother, and you must persuade papa. We must have it before my leave’s up—say to-morrow week.”

Mrs. Dimsdale was sick, and she was indolent, while it would have required the strength of a horse and the courage of a lion to withstand Charlie. “Well, if we must, we must,” said she with a deep sigh. “Make your dreadful list and show it me, and then May can write the notes.” The Squire

made a wry face, though he ended by giving in with a better grace than his wife.

"But I won't have May fastened to the piano all night. There must be some music, Charlie. I'll see about it. If there is to be dancing," he said with a smile, "she shall dance too." And he did his best to forward, though a little unsympathetically, his children's pastime.

May was terror-stricken at the quantity of invitations which Charlie compelled her to send, and at their results, for everybody under a hundred chose to consider themselves children on the occasion. Parties at Fernyhurst had become rare of late, and were the more valuable. Mr. Drayton even declared, with a shrewd twinkle in his eye, that he feared a sacrifice was in prospect for his sister and his niece, who had announced a visit to him in the course of the next week, when their "duty," he said, would compel them probably to feel it necessary . . .

To Mrs. Dimsdale's great annoyance, indeed, everybody seemed inclined to accept.

"I can't think what all these people are made of. Why can't they stay comfortably at home? Coming out on a cold winter's night in this way! I'm sure I never want to go to them," complained she. She had as much difficulty in remembering the time when she

herself enjoyed going out, as Charlie had in realising the possibility of anybody's remaining quiet by choice.

"I'm sure it will be very good for papa and mamma both," said he importantly, "they don't see enough of the neighbours."

" 'Do as you would be done by' is a dangerous maxim in some people's hands. It should be, 'Do to them as they wish to be done by.' "

A large instalment of cousins arrived to help before the great fray began—Lionel and his sisters, and two little daughters of the unlucky Admiral Raby, the object of Charlie's objurgations, who was the husband of Mr. Dimsdale's sister.

Mrs. Raby was a very gentle, affectionate woman, who had followed her husband lovingly about to most of his stations, while the names of their children were a perfect lesson in geography—Lawrence and Christopher—Lusitania, ignominiously shortened into Lucy—Melita into Milly—according as the captain or the admiral's ship had been at Halifax or the West Indies, Lisbon or the Mediterranean. She was a good deal like a hen with a couple of ducklings, for her two extremely pretty little girls, spoiled by their father to the utmost, did very nearly as they pleased without much reference to the maternal clucking. Lucy was still a child; but Milly was as

promising a little flirt of her years as could be found within the four seas, and her presence did not at all tend to assist May in her efforts to keep matters as quiet as she could.

The whole house was in confusion, in spite of all that she could do ; her mother was cross, her father was put out, but there was no withstanding the whirlpool ; everybody wanted some new thing, and it was rather dreary work to her, vainly trying to accomplish the impossible for all sides, to stave off the flood, with the sort of anxious conscientiousness which makes a girl take all her little duties to heart as matters of life and death.

" Surely it's a pity to give all the trouble of those wreaths in the dining-room, Tom," said she, as she saw a whole shrubbery of green boughs being dragged into the house ; " nobody'll dance a bit the better, and it vexes papa to have the walls pulled about, and the Vandyke moved."

" He's just been in, and the carpenters are to hang them ; and if his beloved John Deeds does it, he'll not mind ; besides, he's afraid of the dust of the dancing for the Vandyke, so it must go, and he gave me leave, so don't you torment about it," cried Tom loudly. " Clara and Milly are going to help me, and Charlie's got Amy and Lucy for the other half. I'm

so sorry Walter Scrope wasn't able to come," he went on dolefully.

"And I'm sure I'm very glad," cried Milly, contemptuously, from the top of the rival ladder; I can't think what you can find in that great, awkward, ugly man, who looks as if he never knew whether one was in the room or not."

"Heigh ho! *hinc illæ lacrymæ!* he might be as ugly and as awkward as he pleased, if only he'd bow down before our sovereign lady, Queen Coquetta!"

"I ain't Queen Coquetta. You're very ill-natured, Tom," replied Milly, between laughing and crying, and not quite sure whether it was not a compliment after all.

"Bring me some more pink calico, that's a good girl, May," cried Charlie.

"More silver paper, May, and white tape."

"There is none left," answered she.

"Then send a man and horse to fetch some more. I'm sure papa won't mind," shouted Tom from somewhere near the ceiling.

"It's quite too late, dear, and everybody is busy."

Still, every time she looked in, there was a fresh relay of requests.

"It's long past six," said she at last, "and people are to be here at seven."

"Oh, do you fasten up these roses, May, that's a darling. I *must* go and dress; there's only just time to do my hair!" cried Milly, fluttering down anxiously from her lofty perch.

"Halloo! there are the mids!" called Charlie, as a loud ring was heard, and three little sailors came into the room. "You'll finish this bit round the mantelpiece, May, that's a duck. I must take them up-stairs directly." And he carried them off in a whirlwind almost before they had time to make their devoirs.

"Let me stay and help you, May," cried Amy, affectionately.

"No, dear, we can't dress altogether. It'll really help most if you will go off directly," she answered, with rather a sigh.

"How tired you will be, May, before we can even begin!" said Lionel, coming in as his sister went out, still in his shooting-coat. He had been sitting with his uncle, who had taken refuge in the study, the only quiet place in the house. He looked compassionately into her weary face as he helped her down from the chair on which she was standing to complete the last of Charlie's mottoes. "You ought to have a cup of tea, or something, and to go and lie down. Let me fetch you one. It's too bad of the

boys to drive you so till the last minute ; you won't enjoy the dancing a bit."

It was a comfort to get a word of sympathy in the midst of the turmoil, and May smiled gratefully, though there was no time to accept the offer. As she came down-stairs again, ready equipped, she met old Nursey, who had been busy helping in the regions below, and was now coming up to inspect her beloved child "in her grandeurs." She clung to the privilege of calling her still, like a child, by her name.

"Well, you do look just nice, my dear May ! I will say that for you—there ain't one of 'um, I'll be bound, as 'll look half so pretty as my child !" said the old woman proudly, as, with her candle in her hand, she walked round her on the landing, and examined her critically from top to toe. "Let me set your sash straight, dearie."

As she spoke, Lionel, who had just finished dressing, came suddenly out of his own door. May was standing at the top of the dark oak staircase, backed by the dim passage, with its carved cabinets and blue japan china. The light of a hanging lamp shone down upon the red camellia in her brown hair, and her long brown eyelashes threw a shadow on her cheek which looked like the ripe side of a peach.

She blushed and turned away as he said, smiling, "Let me look too, Nursey."

"Stay, Miss May, there's a pin loose," said the old woman, holding her by the gown.

"I like all that cloudy haze of white drapery; it's like a mist. What is it called? They didn't have such in the Kaffir wigwams, you know; so I'm improving my mind," he said with a laugh as they turned down-stairs together.

"What, have they begun already?" cried she, as the sound of the piano in the dining-room reached their ears.

"Only a preliminary canter, I suppose, before any one comes," replied Lionel.

All the young ones in the house had collected there, and the fun was growing fast and furious; much more so, indeed, than it would be later in the evening.

"May, come here!" cried Charlie. "Milly can't make out the steps of the 'Tempête.'"

"And Amy's forgotten the last half of the tune," followed up Tom.

"I'll find the music; but, Tom, we must go in and help in the drawing-room. There is another ring! And papa and mamma will be quite vexed if we all keep away like this, and don't do any duty. Do come."

But nobody paid the least attention, or indeed

heard her; there was a furious gallop going on, and the noise drowned everything else.

“I’ll come in and welcome, if that would be any use,” said Lionel, following her into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Dimsdale, in rather lugubrious state, looking much bored and rather repellent, and the Squire, standing by the fire, shy and reserved, were receiving their guests with very unfestive solemnity. Two or three of those miserable early comers, who always arrive everywhere too soon, were there, like the first drops of a thunder shower; an awkward young curate, who had ridden ten miles; and a fat old woman, with a scraggy niece, who had chartered a fly, and wanted to be home early. Mrs. Dimsdale called up Lionel to her side, however, and her rigid brows relaxed; and when May came near her father a smile passed over his face, even in the midst of his troubles. It was extremely tiresome and slow, but at length the remainder of the folk arrived, they moved into the dancing-room, and business began in earnest.

May was a little too anxious about everything to enjoy herself thoroughly, for the brunt of the entertaining fell upon her. Her mother retreated early into the empty drawing-room—“out of the noise” she said—with a disengaged matron or two; Mr.

Dimsdale, although he did his best to be kind to his guests, disappeared several times in the course of the evening; Charlie and Tom were far too intent on amusing themselves with the prettiest girls and the best dancers to be of any use; and, if it had not been for Lionel, she would hardly have known how to get through the evening. He danced, at her request, with the plain young ladies, who ought not to be neglected, was civil to the old ones, who wanted to carry off their broods too soon, and his handsome, pleasant, soldier look and manner made him very popular, while his unselfish courtesy to everybody was a godsend to poor May.

"You are keeping that dance before supper for me, May," he said, coming back to her side, looking rather weary as he deposited the "young lady of forty," who was an insatiable waltzer, by her chaperon, considerably younger than herself.

"Oh, Lionel, how good you are! We never should have managed without you I'm sure. Charlie is too bad, he doesn't help a bit—he hasn't danced one duty dance all night."

"I was aide-de-camp to General Benyon for three months when poor Amyot died, you know," he answered, with a smile, "so I'm up to the work. Never mind Charlie; let him enjoy himself."

It was the third time she had danced with him ; for while he was doing duty for both her brothers, she could hardly refuse anything he asked of her.

“ Charlie, you really ought to dance with Sophia Longmore. You’ve neither of you been near her the whole evening ; it is quite rude ; and she’s Mr. Drayton’s niece after all.”

“ Here’s metal more attractive,” said Charlie, with a profound bow to Milly of the Dockyard, quoting not from Hamlet, however, but the last burlesque ; “ Sophia is such a prig, and so affected. Make Tom do it.”

“ But I have asked him, and he won’t go.”

“ Well, I can’t help it. I’m engaged ten deep. Tell her I’ll come after that. I believe that I am to have the honour of dancing this dance with you ?” he said, taking hold of his exceedingly pretty little cousin.

Milly was in great spirits, but, having reached the mature age of fifteen, she was torn in sunder by the desire of being grand and womanly and wearing long gowns, and the temptation to be mad and merry with the child privileges of short ones.

“ How funny it is to see Charlie here !” said she to May, coming up out of breath after “ such a jolly galop.” “ But you can’t waltz a bit, and you know

I like Tom best to dance with," she added, with a sidelong glance over her shoulder away from her partner.

"Because he's the tallest man in the room," retorted Charlie, "and you're the shortest girl by a long chalk."

"You shouldn't be so rude to a lady!" replied Milly with dignity. "You've no notion how proper he is at the Dockyard dinners, May; he says nothing hardly but, 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' to papa, and under his voice too."

It was quite true; the Admiral kept his officers, if not his daughters, in excellent order, and held Master Charlie at arm's length whenever he appeared in the house.

"Lionel," called out Milly as she prepared to whisk off again, but throwing out another grappler for future operations, "you haven't danced with me yet, remember."

"I'm not so tall as Tom," replied Lionel, smiling lazily, "and I'm too old and stiff for such a particular little dainty lady."

"I'm not particular, and I'm not dainty," pouted Milly.

"Then I am," replied he, with hard-hearted composure.

"The dancing was much more graceful in my day, and the girls were prettier," said Mrs. Dimsdale to an old lady, at whose request she had come to look once more into the dining-room. She looked very stately in her silver-grey brocade, and a profusion of black lace, as she stood in the doorway. "I call the dancing nowadays great romping."

"I'm sure Miss May doesn't romp or flirt either," said the lady, watching May's rather anxious face as she moved about the room, having just danced with the curate, and standing up now again with Charlie's youngest mid.

"No," answered her mother rather absently; "but she can't dance like Cecilia, and her father doesn't like her to waltz. Lucy, why don't you go to bed? I never allowed *my* children to sit up in this way; but the Admiral spoils those two girls so dreadfully." She was growing very tired and rather cross.

"It is curious how plaintive that waltz music is. I can't think why," said Mr. Drayton, who was looking benignantly on the dancers once more before he went away, after doing his best to console the Squire under his afflictions. "Don't look so careworn, my Mayflower; it's part of your duty, remember, to enjoy yourself," was his parting greeting to her. "I shall walk home. You can come when you're

ready," he said to his sister, as Mrs. Longmore came ambling up to her hostess.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Dimsdale, I am afraid all this noise and bustle is *very* trying to you! but we must all make sacrifices for our children! I myself not exactly the scene dear girl. As the dear Bishop once said" It was more convenient to generalise her sentences and veil her hints, and the end was lost as she moved forwards.

"May," whispered Charlie, who was within ear-shot, "didn't I tell you? 'Sacrifice,' 'dear girl,' it's all there! only we had the dear Bishop instead of the Canon, in honour of the greatness of the occasion!"

"Oh, Charlie, take care, she'll hear you," said May in an agony.

"Miss Dimsdale," interrupted the little mid, who always came to her at the end of every dance for a fresh partner, "I've asked all those ladies you introduced me to a second time, and they're all engaged, they say; I want a new one. Oh! not those children!" he said with disgust, as she was taking him up to some pretty little girls.

Altogether, it was rather hard work, and she was glad when the evening was at length at an end. At night, when she thought the whole over, she was

sorry for the three dances with Lionel. Having been very much troubled at what she called her "misfortune" with Walter, she wished to be most particularly on her guard. "However, I'm sure he could not mistake me anyhow," she comforted herself. "I treat him just like Tom and Charlie."

Breakfast next morning in the bright sunny south room was late for those who had not gone off by early trains and coaches; and the discussions on past glorious deeds lively and long.

"What a shame it was of you, Charlie! You waltzed half the night with Isabel Forster!"

"Because she waltzed better than any one else in the room," said he undauntedly.

"Didn't you admire Miss Trower's wig, with a rose stitched into the side, and its splendid coronet of false hair?" laughed Milly. "Such fun!"

"Wasn't she a stunner!" burst out the little mid, with tremendous earnestness, only half hearing what was said, and amidst a shout of laughter. He had very much admired her as the biggest woman there.

"Milly was the prettiest creature in the room by far," whispered May at her end of the table, not meaning to be heard; but Milly's ears were as quick as her eyes in such matters, and her little person smiled all over.

"It was the jolliest dance I have had for a long time," said Charlie, rubbing his hands. He found that he was much more considered as his father's son in his father's house than as an accidental mid at a dockyard ball, and enjoyed his consequence accordingly.

"I think I like dancing at other people's balls better," said May.

"You're so abominably conscientious. Why can't you let the ugly old maids take care of themselves?"

"Perhaps if you were one, you might not think so; you would be glad to see May coming to look after you. I'm sure I should," observed his father, looking down the long table at her. "May, will you remember to look after me when I am an ugly old maid, please, and not after Charlie?"

"No, papa; that's not fair. I wasn't depreciating May's attentions a bit. I thought them only too good for Miss Trower. But we shall be awfully late, Brand," said he, turning to one of the mids. "I say, Lionel, did you really mean that you'll lend me that pistol?"

And they all left the room except May, who remained behind to give her father another cup of tea.

"To be sure, it is a queer pleasure!" said he. "I went out at the garden door last night to see that

all was going on right outside, and I looked in at the dining-room window, and stopped my ears to the music, and to see you all bobbing about like a parcel of mad grasshoppers, without rhyme or reason, was more absurd than you can fancy," said the Squire, cynically.

"Yes, papa, dear," said May, coming behind him with his cup of tea, and kissing the top of his bald head. "But you know you used to like dancing too when you were a grasshopper yourself."

"More fool I," answered he.

"No, pappy: there's a time to dance and a time to be still, and he is a nicer papa than he would have been if he had not gone through each thing in its season," said she, affectionately.

"And then it's such trouble to the servants! There have been three breakfasts, at least, this very morning, for the early starts, before this one; and all the horses and grooms for ten miles round eating their heads off last night in the stable-yard!"

"Yes, papa; but it's only for once. I believe the servants like it for once, and Charlie isn't often at home, and so many people enjoyed it. It was a very kind thing to do for them all, and everybody felt it to be so. It wasn't to please yourself—everybody knew that; and you gave such a quantity of plea-

sure;” and she put her two arms round his neck, when her father’s features relaxed, if he did not absolutely smile.

It was harder work to soothe her mother, who had been bored and neglected, she declared, all the evening, and wearied with the noise and the lights.

“And I didn’t know half the people in the room! I’m sure everybody must have brought all their cousins—it was too bad! and people whom I have avoided visiting all these years, that Charlie has brought down upon us in this way, and I must begin seeing now!”

“Dear mother, I’m sure you need not call on any of them. Everybody understood that the party was for your children’s pleasure, not yours.”

But Mrs. Dimsdale refused to be comforted: she was always rather more querulous than usual when “poor Charlie” went away. In spite of his crimes, he was her favourite son, and she expended an immense amount of very unnecessary pity on that most prosperous young gentleman.

“And there’s Charlie. I’m sure I don’t know when I shall see him again,” she was beginning, almost in tears, when Lionel came to the rescue. His aunt was exceedingly fond of him: she was by

no means insensible to the *caprice des yeux* ; she had been a beauty herself, and valued the quality in others. The plainness of her sons was a trial to her, and she fell back on her nephew. And as he assisted her progress into the drawing-room, looked after her paraphernalia of bags and baskets, fetched and carried for her, he smoothed down the old lady into good humour again, and greatly facilitated May's task during that somewhat dreary time—the day after a ball ; when all the litter and damage are full in view, and the pleasure is over, and the excitement has run down like a clock.

They sat in the drawing-room that evening, the elders trying to keep awake, the young ones round the piano, where Milly was singing the most desperately sentimental songs in her rather sensational repertory.

“Why don't you practise that accompaniment, Milly? That song would be very pretty if you could play it better,” said her aunt, half asleep.

“Yes, auntie.—Some people think it very pretty as it is,” whispered she, audaciously.

“I don't like all that sugar and water, Milly,” said Lionel, at last. “I wish you'd sing something wholesome and settling, instead of all that rubbish about endearing young charms, and ‘cherish wreaths for ever,’ and the rest of it.”

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“You’d like this better, I suppose,” replied Milly disdainfully, beginning a nigger melody.

Lionel never would flirt with her, and she therefore unconsciously, in her half-childish desire for empire, like larger coquettes, bestowed a greater share of attention on him than upon anybody else in the house.

“There’s a capital chorus to that: let’s have it,” cried Tom, joining in with the sort of roar which he considered to be singing.

“What was that pretty German song, May, you were playing the other day?” put in Lionel. “There was a chorus to that, too.”

Milly, rather ostentatiously, made way for her cousin.

“No, dear; you’ll play it much better than I can,” replied May, pressing her down again on the music stool.

“What are you all about, you children? Are you going to sing all night? Go to bed. Do you know what o’clock it is?” said the Squire, waking suddenly out of a doze.

“Oh, papa, let us have one more song.”

“Only one more, Uncle Dimsdale,” sounded on all sides.

“And it shall be such a respectable and proper

one for Lionel!" said Milly, looking up into his face, as she began "For Auld Lang Syne;" "and it shall have a chorus for Tom," she went on, with a glance at the other side.

The rich old melody rang through the large room with a certain pathos in the contrast of its words and the fresh young voices which were singing it, so that the Squire paused on his way to the door, turned, and stood listening until the end. There is a sort of complex feeling in all emotions late in life; they do not stand alone in the experience of the man, with whom a whole chord of associations and recollections is often awakened by a single tone. Young things always believe that what they are doing and thinking is quite new and peculiar to themselves. There is no background to their lives or their thoughts, which is probably the reason of the general absence of sympathy amongst them with all sorrow and trouble not exactly like their own.

Still, real sympathy, either in the old or the young, is among the rarest of qualities. What is usually given as such is merely a reflected compassion of our own selves or our own sorrows in the person of another.

CHAPTER VIII.

GO OR STAY.

“‘It is music,’ they say, ‘it is music.’ Is the sound of bells and drums all that is meant by music?

‘It is proper,’ they say, ‘it is proper.’ Are jewels and silk all that is meant by propriety?”

CONFUCIUS.

“THERE is a very kind invitation for you, May, from your aunt at Brickwall,” said Mrs. Dimsdale, one morning.

“Must I go, papa? I’d much rather stay at home,” replied May, looking at her father, and remembering certain passages with Lionel, wafts from the *pays du tendre*, which she did not at all wish to encourage, yet which she could hardly put into words without making more of them than was desirable. She was not intimate with her mother, and it was quite possible that any hint of this would make her discuss “particulars,” of which May had a horror, and then declare there was nothing in them.

“My dear,” said Mrs Dimsdale, who was not especially fond of a visit to her sister’s herself, and

therefore naturally resented the same feeling in her children, "you never seem to wish to go to your aunt's. I cannot think why not; it is very kind of her to ask you, and I don't know any girls better brought up than your cousins. I wish you were half as well educated."

The Squire made a wry face, but May's head was luckily turned the other way.

"I should like you to go, certainly," ended her mother, decisively, and more solemnly than the occasion demanded.

"You'd better do as your mother wishes," said Mr. Dimsdale, going out of the room, though he might have known that May would not appeal again. "You needn't stay long," he looked in once more to say. "We will send you to the New Inn, and they'll meet you there, of course."

It was a pleasant spring day—buds bursting, larks soaring and singing, and May, who rarely left home, felt her spirits rise, when at the solitary little half-way inn she found her three cousins.

"Lionel's driving," said Clara; "won't you go on the box with him, May?"

"Oh, no, let me come with you, dear," she answered quickly; "I haven't seen you for such a long time."

But as the carriage was a sort of inside car—which Lionel had instituted since his return home instead of the heavy old barouche—the box-seat and those within were not very far apart, and the drive back was pleasant with a careless merriment not common under Brickwall rule.

“Look how prettily your cottage is turning out, May,” said Amy, as they passed the unfinished building near their own gates.

“I’m very thankful to hear it, though I did nothing whatever except to go on drawing as I was bid,” she answered, smiling, as she leant out to see. “Oh, yes, I believe I did wring that additional gable and the labels over the windows out of papa—he was so afraid of Aunt Wilmot and her estimates.”

“They would have looked like eyes without eyebrows; it was a great improvement. I was very much obliged,” observed Lionel, looking over his shoulder instead of at his two young horses.

“Oh, mind that corner! You shaved that post most frightfully near, Lionel,” cried Amy anxiously.

“Sit down, Clara,” said Lionel, very distinctly, as his sister started up in the carriage. “How can you be so careless?—you were as nearly over as possible.”

“I hope you managed your span of forty oxen

therefore naturally resented the same feeling in her children, "you never seem to wish to go to your aunt's. I cannot think why not; it is very kind of her to ask you, and I don't know any girls better brought up than your cousins. I wish you were half as well educated."

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It was a pleasant spring day—buds bursting, larks soaring and singing, and May, who rarely came, felt her spirits rise, when at the solitary half-way inn she found her three cousins.

"Lionel's driving," said Fern, "and I'll take the box with him, May?"

"Oh, no, let me
answered quickly; "
long time."

better," laughed Clara, a little frightened, but recovering herself. "You'd have had me put under arrest in Caffreland, I suspect; you were a frightful despot out there, now weren't you, Lionel?"

"Take care, you'd better not speak evil of dignities; remember he has got our lives still in his hand, Clara," said May.

"No man is obliged to criminate himself," answered he with a smile; "and I'm in May's blackest books as it is, I know, for shooting a savage instead of letting him shoot me!"

"Oh, Lionel, you never told us about the savage," cried his sisters; but they were now driving up to the house, and all such unseasonable gaiety subsided. Everything there was in such order, that if a dead leaf was seen blowing about on the gravel, a gardener was sent for immediately to take it into custody.

"I did not know that you intended to go with the girls to-day, Lionel," said his mother gravely, when she saw him handing May out of the carriage, as she led the way into the drawing-room. It was a pleasant room, or would have been so under a different *régime*. Its three large old-fashioned sash-windows with their deep window-seats looked over the sloping lawn and garden, with an open, if rather bald, view

beyond ; but all the wood-work, the handsome oak panels of the walls, and the curious carved chimney-piece, had been painted a greenish white under Lady Wilmot's rule. It could not be denied, in spite of its barbarism, that the room was at least lighter for the misdeed.

It was never, however, used except in the evening, and the furniture had that exasperating look of tidiness which throws a cold chill even upon those most warmly disposed ; a circle of smart books lay on the bare table, which one knows without opening them to have as little inside as if they were shams, while the chairs all looked as if they were screwed into the floor, and there was that general colourless insipidity about the whole air of the room which was considered " elegant " some thirty years ago.

" It would be a great improvement to clean off all this paint, don't you think so, May ? " said Lionel, turning to her. " I've been considering whether it couldn't be done ever since you were all talking of it so much at Fernyhurst."

" I'm afraid that May's taste can hardly be depended upon after her unlucky failure at the cottage," observed her aunt a little acidly. Lionel looked surprised ; he had not counted on so ungracious a response, and was silent, while his mother opened

the door into a little sitting-room beyond, to cut short any such objectionable discussions.

It was small and dull, with an East aspect; but as Lady Wilmot always sat there with the girls, it looked, in spite of these drawbacks, so much more comfortable and *homey*, that they were all glad to take refuge there.

The afternoon passed quietly away. Every hour was subjected to "proper discipline" under Lady Wilmot's sway, and though it was slightly relaxed in May's favour, or rather for Lionel's sake (as nothing else could have produced a change in the "customs" of the place, as rigid as those of Dahomey), yet by rule was every word and deed, every bite and sup, performed. May knew that her aunt did not like her—to think for oneself about anything is a great crime with Lady Wilmot's class of minds. Indeed, if you know that you are infallible, and that your opinion is in all things, and at all times, superior to that of every other human being, how can you help giving your fellow-creatures the advantage of it, and regulating all before you from the purest philanthropic motives? So that May found herself, as usual, in a perpetual *douche* of improving remarks—no doubt a very salutary, but not by any means a fascinating, style of intercourse.

“How very odd you should wear those absurd little grey boots! why don’t you get proper thick ones like mine?” “What! you’ve never read Russell’s ‘Modern Europe?’” “Not enjoy Cowper’s poems! Indeed, my dear, you *have* a great deal to learn.” “What a very untidy thing that jacket is!” and the like, had been going on from time to time pretty continuously. And the next morning, after breakfast, when they had all retired into the book-room, Lady Wilmot, annoyed at Lionel for following them in, went on with redoubled asperity.

“I don’t like that way of wearing the hair at all,” said she, looking with much distaste at her niece’s rich brown locks, which had a chestnut tinge as the sun shone on them in the open window, where she was standing thoughtfully with some sprigs of myrtle in her hand which Lionel had just given her.

“Oh, mamma, I think it is so pretty,” burst out Clara as May turned away with a deep blush, not at all liking the attention which her aunt’s remarks drew upon her. Lionel, who admired both the hair and its owner very much, got up and walked to the door, a good deal annoyed at his mother’s performances.

“I should like a word with you about Farmer Walker, Lionel, if you can give me a few minutes in the study,” said she, following him out. She was

honestly at this time pretending to herself that she intended to give up the management of home affairs to her son, elaborately consulting him about every little detail, and then always finding the best possible reasons for not doing what he suggested. The "study" had been her place of business during the long period of her husband's incapacity for such matters, and a capital woman of business she was, and admirably had all the affairs of the family been conducted there during her regency. Although she now, with much ceremony, always talked of the room as "Lionel's," she was perpetually in and out of it; and though, whenever he proposed to her to continue there, she absolutely refused to consent, she had, not unnaturally, a good deal of difficulty in giving it up. In a few minutes they both came out again together, Lady Wilmot saying, with dignity, as she went up-stairs, "Of course, if you wish it, Lionel, the man must have his way, but I really must warn you that it would be the ruin of the place. Your dear father would never have suffered such a thing for a moment."

"Well, do as you please, mother, I dare say it'll be all right," answered her son, coming back into the book-room, and looking round with much disappointment when he now found Amy there alone. "My poor old father must have changed wonderfully

since I saw him, if he said and did all the things ascribed to him by tradition," he went on, laughing a little savagely.

Amy looked up a good deal frightened from the heap of books which she was covering with brown paper. "Oh, Lionel, please don't."

"I wish my mother wouldn't consult me; it is such a farce! Let her drive the team her own way until——. If I only knew whether I should go or stay," he muttered as he threw himself down on the sofa, which was of that uncompromising kind, with hard scrolls and wooden knobs in all sorts of inconvenient directions, which seems to protest against any idea of comfort, much less of lounging. "There is hardly a chair in the house fit to sit on," he went on, half aloud.

"I don't quite understand, dear," said Amy, anxiously; "you're not thinking about going away again, Lionel, surely?"

But Lionel was silent.

"There is that poor curate, Johnson, going up to the church, I see. Has she asked him, after all, to dinner to-morrow, do you know?" he went on presently, looking out. "It is so unkind not to have him here oftener when there is hardly another house about for him to go to."

"She doesn't like him," observed Amy, timidly ; "she says that he interfered about the school too much, but I believe he was quite right after all. I wish she would let him do more there ; he really knows a great deal about it."

Lionel gave a sort of impatient little snort. "If she has not written, I shall just walk down and ask him myself," said he ; "it's downright rude to leave him out in this way. What's become of Clara and May?"

"Mamma has sent them somewhere about something," answered she wearily ; "I believe it was to the farm."

"I can't think what you can find in that Johnson, that you want to have him at dinner in this way," said his mother, in an annoyed tone, when she found what her son had done, later in the day.

"I don't find a great deal in him, dear mother," he said gently, "but he is a plain, straightforward, honest man, and I don't like him to feel himself neglected ; one more at dinner won't add much to your trouble, I hope."

"And then such sermons as he preaches," went on Lady Wilmot, without listening ; "I really must have some conversation with him about them some day ; he is become so exceedingly——"

"Pray don't, dear mother; you know I shouldn't like him to give me advice, however good, upon my company drill, or you about the conduct of your household," answered Lionel, smiling kindly.

"But then that's quite different, Lionel; he knows nothing whatever about those things," replied Lady Wilmot with some heat.

"I think I hear the horses at the door, didn't you talk of taking us to Walsall Abbey to-day? What, May, are you not going to ride?" said he in a disappointed tone as she came in with her bonnet on instead of her habit. "And isn't Amy coming?"

"Mamma says that she has got a cold, and that May had better go in the carriage," was all the answer he received.

"I don't know about going to Walsall," observed his mother gravely. "Your father did not at all approve of the course the Barlows took about the Catholic question."

"But we'll promise not to catch their opinions by going into their ruins," replied Lionel. "I thought the Barlows were after my mother's own heart in everything—particularly politics," he added in a vexed tone to Clara, as he went out to mount his horse alone rather disconsolately.

"'Nous avons changé tout ça,' though it's we

who have altered, not they," answered she in the same low tone, a little flippantly, as she got into the carriage after her mother and May.

Lady Wilmot was a good woman after her own fashion, and rather a clever one, but her conversation could scarcely be called agreeable. There were four distinct walls round her mind; everything within that space was true and certain, everything without was wrong and absurd. There could be no doubt about any matter, no uncertain region where from absence of knowledge or absence of proof the mind must be content to rest as well as it can, and "remain respectfully in doubt," knowing only that it cannot know. She had made up her opinions on everything, from the cut of a petticoat to the doctrine of the Trinity, and where *she* was convinced, it was mere ignorant presumption in any one else to be of a different opinion, or even to deliberate for an instant. "The true is what I think, the right is what I am," was the wording of her thoughts. Her mind was rounded off with the admirable certainty which pervades some epochs of philosophy, and, with Archbishop Usher, she would have declared, with perfect satisfaction in her own powers and knowledge, that "the world was made on the 3rd of September, of a Wednesday, in the afternoon."

As they drove along she went on zealously improving the opportunity.

“I can’t understand, May, the line your father has taken upon this church-rate business. One would think that he really liked the dissenters!”

May remained prudently silent at first.

“And as to the political question, everybody must see that as the State can only teach the Truth, and ought to have a conscience upon the greatest——”

“But, Aunt Wilmot, you yourself thought about the Catholic votes, you remember——” began May, a little hotly, her colour rising in defence of her father; but a warning pinch from Clara brought her up short. What was the use of fighting?

“My dear, how can you be so absurd, when Sir Robert and the Duke were both convinced that——”

Lady Wilmot had gone round herself, following in the wake of her favourite statesman; but there is this curious quality belonging to the positive order of minds, that when for any reason they have entirely altered their opinions and “turned their backs,” like the Irishman, “upon themselves,” they are completely unconscious of it, and, like Lady Wilmot, are always quite as positive of the new form as the old. Inasmuch, indeed, as any opinion is right because they hold it, the new point stands on as firm a ground as

the old one, and they are quite as much astonished in both cases that you can venture to disagree with "absolute right," which is honestly one and the same thing in their minds with themselves.

But a perpetual laying down of the law in morals, manners, politics, and religion, becomes not a little wearisome to a mind such as May's, taught to look upon perpetual growth as the living law of existence by a man like her father, whose horizon grew ever wider as he rose higher by advance of years. And she was almost more tired after the drive with her aunt than if she had done the fourteen miles on foot.

Other matters, however, at Brickwall, went on much better. Lionel never again appealed to her judgment after the uncomfortable result of his first unlucky remark; he showed no disposition to resist his mother's evident efforts to keep them apart, but contented himself with being a kind and courteous host, and making May feel at ease, while he showed by every means in his power that she was an honoured and welcome guest, which Lady Wilmot sometimes made a little difficult. May congratulated herself that her visit had brought her into no dangerous rapids, and began to think that she had been nervous without any reason.

CHAPTER IX.

“UNDER THE HAWTHORN IN THE DALE.”

“I heard a thousand blended notes
As in a grove I sat reclined,
In that same mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.”

WORDSWORTH.

IT was the last day of May's visit, and they were all sitting at breakfast, when Lady Wilmot broke in on some very unimproving laughter, chiefly, however, between the girls, for Lionel had been looking unusually absent and grave the whole time. “My dear Lionel, I hope you intend going to the sessions this morning. I particularly desire it.”

“Dear mother,” said he, rousing himself, “if I were going to stay in England it would be all very right, I dare say, but I may be ordered off any time, here to-day and gone to-morrow, and it would be very absurd of me to go and put my nose into affairs I know nothing about.”

But Lady Wilmot was not to be so daunted, and she went on at such length that Lionel at last answered, rather impatiently—

"Very well, mother, I'll go ; don't let us say anything more about it."

Lady Wilmot rose and rang the bell. "You may take breakfast away, Thomas. Were you not going to give some order about your horses, Lionel?" she said, turning to her son. The measure was a little strong, but he kept his temper.

"Tell John to put the saddle on Black Bess," he said. "I shall be back, Clara, in time to ride with you and May," and he went out of the room without a word more.

Even Lady Wilmot, through her somewhat rhinoceros-hide, felt a little quiver at her victory. Here was she ordering about the master of the house like a child—a man who had been in command of a military district and many hundred men, and judging for him as if he had been ten years old. But of course, she "knew that she was right," and she therefore turned upon the others with double asperity. Clara was sent off to the school, Amy to look up some home matters. May, who had been longing for an hour to herself, slipped away, but she was not to be allowed so to escape. A little while after, Lady Wilmot passed through the book-room, and, giving divers orders to Amy, observed: "And when you have done all this you can come straight to me

and finish that chapter of the 'Modern Europe.' I wonder where May is. You had better call her. I was quite shocked at her ignorance yesterday. It was evident that she hadn't a notion of the date of the discovery of gunpowder!"

"But, mamma," said Amy timidly, "May knows a great deal of things."

"How can you talk such intolerable English, my dear? A great deal of things! Yes, she is quite blue in that sort of loose way—here a little, and there a little, where she likes a thing, but no order, no method in her reading."

Now, I regret to say that May was all this time squatted on the ground before a bookcase in the corner, behind the shelter of a long table cover, and that she did not stir to give herself up, but let her aunt pass on without making any sign. She had fished out an article on Mrs. Browning (Clara always declared of her that she knew the home of every book much better than the owners)—there was nothing more lively than a quarterly review to be found in the house, which was full of those dreadful books "which no gentleman's library should be without," and with her prize she sped through an open window as fast as she could. If her aunt had called her, her conscience would have caused her to

reply, but, though it is to be feared it was but a subtle casuistical distinction, she did not feel obliged to give herself into custody without. The whole garden was on the slope of the hill, in full view of Lady Wilmot's searching eye, and May remembered with envy the great old "pleasure-ground" at home, in whose wide green glades a dozen people might take their pastime without interfering with each other. She jumped the hahs at the bottom, however, and reached at last a little tangle in the park, where the roots of an oak and an old yew made a pleasant seat, and the budding thorns shut it in from observation.

It was a delicious spring day, bright and cheery, a brisk little breeze just stirred the young leaves of every shade of yellow green in the trees above her head, mixed with a beautiful crab, in a full dress of pink and white. The birds were answering each other out of every bush, twittering, whistling, singing—the long note of the thrush almost as beautiful as that of the nightingale in the wood beyond—the rooks cawing in the great trees, the lambs bleating in the field below. Flowers were peeping out in every direction, the exquisite little wood-sorrel nestled into the hollow of the oak, tufts of primroses grew on the mossy bank, little strawberry flowers shone

like stars, and sweet aromatic whiffs of scent came out of the thyme as she passed her hand with almost a caress over the turf. All the fresh early youth of the year seemed to be bursting into life, and enjoying itself, and May felt like the birds and the flowers. She troubled herself very little about her book, which indeed she had only taken with her because it was a crime at Brickwall, as in many English houses, to be caught sitting still "only thinking." She now lay back against the trunk of the old tree, looking up at the white fleecy clouds dappling the pale blue sky, or watching an insect in a shining coat of green shot with gold, which was walking deliberately up her hand. The feeling of her own smallness and limited capacities came over her—which is almost always the result of the rare occasions when we are alone with Nature. She is carrying on a multitude of operations all round us, which we apprehend so dimly, which clearly have no reference to man, who elsewhere considers himself her master, and fancies that all is framed for his use. What were the birds saying to each other? The notes are like nothing we call music. How did her little beetle communicate with the friend whom he presently met on her sleeve, as he evidently did quite to his own satisfaction?

She was beginning, however, to be a little troubled with remorse for having forsaken Amy, when she turned suddenly, and saw Lionel coming up to her from the field below.

"Why, Lionel, I thought you were judging your fellow-creatures," said she, half rising, a little nervously.

"Hang my fellow-creatures," answered he irreverently. "I've enough to do with myself this morning;" and he sat down very determinedly beside her.

"I fancied no one knew of this hiding-place," said she.

"You see," he put in apologetically, "old Andrews stopped me to ask about selling the 'yoes,' which I know as much about as my mother does of Petty Sessions," he added, half laughing; "and when I got to the foot of the hill I saw a shimmer under the black yew, and came up with a proper thirst for information to make out what it might be. Clara said you were fond of this place."

"Yes, we used to make houses here in old days, when we were children," answered May, her nervousness increasing. What would happen if her aunt should find them thus alone together?

"Read this," he said, noticing her shy looks, and

pulling a letter out of his pocket; “I want you to help me to decide.”

It was an order to join his regiment in Canada.

“Oh, how hard! What a pity!” cried May, looking up from the letter as she went on reading with a glow of indignation. “Must you really leave England already?”

“Well, I perhaps might exchange, but I’ve a great mind to sell out. It is sharp practice sending me off so soon; I’ve hardly had ten months’ leave, and I hate going away again, though some things might make the staying still worse to me. I can’t tell you how I long for a home now, after so many long years spent abroad in those wild places. It is like a great nick cut out of my life; one feels so isolated, so ignorant about a heap of interests which everybody else has at their fingers’ ends. Will you not come and make a home for me here, May, which it can never be as it is, you can see that for yourself. Dear, I love you so truly that I think I could have made you care for me if I’d only had time. Will not you try even now, though it is at such short notice?” he said, taking hold of both her hands as she started up.

“Oh! please, pray, Lionel,” she entreated, as she tried to set herself free and turned to go, while a

little shower of the useless pink and white petals fell over her.

"Those rascals at the Horse Guards have hurried me so that I haven't a chance. Won't you think of it, May?" pleaded her cousin. "Ah! you see I was right when I said there might be worse things for me than leaving England," he went on sadly. As she walked rapidly away towards home by the back way, not daring to pass up through the garden, he kept by her side. "My mother would give up this house, she *does* what is right," he muttered in a low voice. "I never should think of asking you to live here with her." But May hurried on in silence.

They had nearly reached the place where a little boy stood holding his horse.

"Oh! Lionel," she said, "I am so grieved that I ever came here now; so grieved for it all, because I like you so much, you know, but as my cousin, only as my cousin. I always hoped that we might be like brother and sister together all our lives," and she almost wrung her hands.

"I shan't give up hope; it may grow into a different love perhaps in time; at all events, I shall keep on hoping," he answered bravely.

"No, no!" she cried in great agitation, "you

must not think any more about it; indeed you must not."

"You don't care for any one else?" he inquired suddenly, looking fixedly at her.

"Nobody at all," she said, lifting up her eyes with their honest straightforward expression; "but I don't think that signifies."

"I do, a great deal," he answered more cheerfully, "else I'd exchange into a regiment for China, and get knocked on the head as quickly as I could. You can't prevent my hoping, May, whatever you do."

They parted, the pain on the pleasant, handsome face making May's heart ache as she slowly turned back towards the house.

Somehow Lionel found the Petty Sessions, or some other business, so absorbing that day, that he could not come back to ride; and they did not see him all the afternoon.

At night there were, fortunately, people at dinner, the unlucky Mr. Johnson among the number, who was unconsciously of the greatest use, his presence making such a diversion in Lady Wilmot's mind that, occupied with his obnoxious qualities, she had little time for observing the others.

Later too in the evening, that amount of bad

music which seems to be necessary in English society came to their assistance—since every young lady is not only bound to play and sing in most houses, whether she has ear, taste, and voice, or not, but all her friends are compelled to listen to her. Harmony is charming, even with small capacities of voice, and the separate little tinkles which were murdering Italian bravura songs that night might have produced a very respectable result if their owners would have worked hard at part singing—the power of doing which, in catches, madrigals, and glees, seems to have been included in a “liberal education,” both for men and women, among our forefathers.

Lady Wilmot remembered afterwards, with considerable satisfaction, that she had scarcely seen May and Lionel speak to each other all the time, and congratulated herself on her good management. Her innuendoes and contradictory accusations against May—that she was blue, and that she was very ignorant, that she thought too much of her personal appearance, and that she was too careless concerning it—were all directed, with the highest motives, to the proper guarding of the affections of her son, and the direction of the taste of her daughters. Having been compelled to ask her niece, she had resolved she would make good use

of the opportunity, and the fruits of her admirable judgment were now before her.

There is one drawback, however, to infallibility; the persons possessed of it naturally do not try to make out the circumstances of the case or the thoughts of the people whom they undertake to advise, as meaner mortals must; and therefore, whether popes or old ladies, very often deliver their Encyclicals at the wrong time, drive their blow on the wrong nail, and make fast the very point which they want to destroy, so that Lady Wilmot's children loved and admired May with all their might, in spite, or perhaps because, of their mother's proceedings, which only made them prize their cousin the more.

CHAPTER X.

INFALLIBILITY.

“There was heresy here you perceive, for the right
Of privately judging, means simply that light
Has been granted to *me* for deciding on *you* ;
And in happier times, before atheism grew,
The deed contained clauses for cooking you too.” LOWELL.

“I’M ordered off to Canada, mother,” said Lionel
at breakfast next morning, shortly and suddenly.

“My dear Lionel, you don’t say so ! What can the
Horse Guards possibly be thinking of ?” said Lady
Wilmot. She was not quite sure whether she was sorry
or not—to be monarch of all you survey has its charms.
She could not quite reconcile herself to be second at
Brickwall ; and then it would remove him from any
danger of admiring May too much. All these conso-
lations passed rapidly through her mind as she spoke.

“Oh, Lionel !” cried the two girls in chorus,
“how shocking ! why you are only just come home.
What a shame ! How soon shall you have to go ?”

“I must sail in about a month,” he said, indif-
ferently.

“My dear boy,” remonstrated his mother, “what

do you mean? You talk of it as if you didn't mind going in the least.

"Don't you think you could get your leave prolonged?" sighed Clara.

"Isn't there anything which could be done to gain a little more time?" cried Amy eagerly.

"I will write myself directly to General Brown," said Lady Wilmot.

"Pray do not! it's quite out of the question, mother," answered Lionel so decidedly that even Lady Wilmot was silenced.

Amy began to cry, and Lionel walked to the window, and looked out without speaking.

"I hope it is a pleasant station," said May timidly, fearing that her silence would be observed by her aunt, and anxious to say something soothing to poor Lionel, who had not trusted himself to speak to her during the whole of breakfast. He turned suddenly, and looked at her, but her face had not the meaning in it that he sought there, and he went back to his window once more.

Lady Wilmot was wondering and lamenting and accusing everybody too much to see what was going on before her eyes.

"There is old Andrews coming in at the gate to speak to me. I must go out to him," said Lionel, at last leaving the room.

The three girls sat silent while Lady Wilmot went on with her exclamations.

"I think I had better go up-stairs and get ready," said May at last, in a low voice; "papa said he would send to meet me at one."

"I shall take you to the New Inn myself," said her aunt cheerfully, rejoiced to get her out of the house, and determined at such a moment for the softening of hearts to leave no opening for mischief. "You may go, too, if you please, Clara; so you had better put on your things at once. I beg, young ladies, that you'll be ready in time, and not keep the carriage waiting."

No one answered, but Amy followed her cousin slowly up-stairs into her room.

"Oh, May," she said, bursting again into tears, "I'm sure you could make him stay if you would. Why won't you say a word? He is so fond of you that I'm sure if you were just to say you wished he were not going it would be enough; for I know he hates it, and I saw how he looked at you. He must have told *you* that he was ordered off, I'm sure, before, for you weren't a bit surprised," she added with a fresh burst of sobs as she sat on the half-filled box. Poor May felt hard driven as she stood silently by going on with a pretence of folding up her possessions.

"Mayn't I say to him that you're sorry he is going, dear?" said Amy piteously.

"No, Amy, you mustn't really," answered she in sudden terror; "he knows that quite well already; and the truth must be true, and kindest in the end—truth to oneself and other people," she mused aloud.

"But is it the truth, and what is the truth? I know that he is not bookish enough for you, May—not what they call superior in that way; but he is a very fine fellow for all that. Dear, there are other things besides that, and he is so good and patient; see how he behaves to mother. And he is so sensible and clever in his own way; he has got my dear father's temper, and yet he is very firm, and has done more than most men in his life. You'd make him so happy."

To poor May's great relief the maid came in with offers of help at this juncture, so that no more could be said. At the last moment of her departure Lionel was not to be found.

"We really cannot wait any longer," said Lady Wilmot magisterially, sitting in state in the barouche.

"He will be so sorry not to see you again," murmured Amy, standing on the steps of the house.

"You'll wish him good-bye for me, dear," answered May sadly.

“Drive on, Thomas!” cried his mistress authoritatively (probably the only person in the house who did not understand what was going on—a household has sharp eyes and ears on such occasions), and the carriage bowled away down the hill. But Lionel repented himself of his stoicism. He reached the lodge by a short cut, and was there panting and flushed to shake hands with May; her veil was however down, and no one could tell what were her feelings under it as the carriage went off again.

And now Lady Wilmot felt safe indeed, the very adieux had been made under her “eagle eye.” She felt so pleased, so satisfied with her success, that she positively petted her niece during the remainder of the way; complimented her on her wish to return home, “where she knew how much she was always wanted;” hoped that after Lionel’s departure she would repeat her visit “to cheer them a little.” It was impossible to get rid of a guest with greater cordiality. In the midst of her sorrow and perplexity (for May was feeling very deeply and painfully) she could hardly help laughing almost aloud. What would her aunt have been now saying and thinking if she were to turn round and begin, “My dear aunt, Lionel asked me to marry him yesterday, and I think on the whole that I mean to accept him? He proposed, in

that case, not to go to Canada, and that you should leave Brickwall immediately." How little Lady Wilmot knew of her obligations to the beloved niece, whom she was embracing so affectionately at parting, for having refused the tempting offer!

"What, is Lionel to go off again already?" said her father, when she reached Fernyhurst and he heard the news. "I'm sure I'm exceedingly sorry. I was quite fond of the lad. He is a capital fellow, full of sense and feeling, and plenty of practical knowledge besides. I should have thought he might have stayed a little in England now and looked after his property—it wants it. I hope he'll find time to come and see us before he goes away altogether."

And he wrote off directly to his nephew, while May felt as guilty as if she had been the Horse Guards in person, or rather as that hard-hearted office ought to feel in the opinion of indignant mothers and sisters.

About a month afterwards, May and her father were just coming out from breakfast when Lionel entered the house, looking pale and out of spirits.

"I have only come to bid you good-bye, Uncle Dimsdale, as you wished it. I must be off again directly," he said. "There is but just time to catch the coach. Can you lend me a horse? I drove over, and Black Bess is done up. Who knows when we

shall meet again?" he said hurriedly. "Give me your good wishes. Good-bye."

"Where is your mother, May? She'll never forgive us if she doesn't see Lionel. Run up to her in the boudoir, boy," said he, and the young soldier cleared the steps three at a time.

May stood sadly leaning against the mullion of the open window at which the soft summer air came in, with the sound of the quiet wind moving among the leaves, but she was not conscious of them. She tried to analyse her own feelings as she heard the murmur of voices in the room above. She was so fond of him, yet she did not love him, she felt sure; not, at least, "in that way." Besides, she could not think of leaving her father, and she had always been taught that it was wrong to marry one's cousin, and she looked round, though without speaking, towards Mr. Dimsdale, who was walking up and down the room lamenting aloud over the departure of his nephew, and his own loss in him. At last Lionel came flying down into the library as fast as he had gone up, as if he hardly dared to trust himself, seized May's hands as she stood in the window, and wrung them passionately as he said,—

"Remember, May, I don't give up hoping; don't forget me. At all events you know you've promised


to be my sister always," and he rushed again out of the room as if unconscious of his uncle's presence. The Squire followed him to the hall door.

"Good-bye, lad, come back to us safe and sound, and as soon as you can, God bless you!" he called out affectionately as the gig drove rapidly away.

A woman is often never so near the point of accepting a man as just after she has refused him; even when her reason tells her that she has done rightly. When her heart is saddened at the pain she sees that she has inflicted, and a reaction from the effort has set in, she asks herself in the collapse whether it was really necessary.

"So that is how things were," said her father, as he came into the room once more. "Poor fellow—poor fellow! Well, I'm very sorry for him—very sorry, indeed. What, you couldn't care for him, May? And he was a fine fellow, too!" He added to himself, "but hardly enough for my May, either."

Poor May was a little disappointed and taken aback. His last words were not uttered aloud. He had said nothing about losing her, or the crime of cousin marriages. When it came to the point, he seemed to have forgotten these things. Her conscience was sorely puzzled, as well as her heart, and she tried vainly to see clearly into it during the rest



of that day. Was she making no sacrifice, and yet trying to give to herself the credit of one? Had she given up attaching herself to Lionel for her father's sake, or was it that she really never could care for him? The mixture of motive was too complicated for her to fathom, and, luckily for her, before she had stirred up any more such unwholesome questionings, she had to go out riding with him. The country round Fernyhurst was a perfect "nosegay" in spring and summer, a consequence of its poor soil, which to May, with her intense delight in nature, was a continual pleasure, and was some compensation for it even to her father. Mr. Wallace, indeed, declares that nowhere in the tropics has he seen such richness of colour and wealth of wild blossom as in some parts of England. And now wreaths of pink and white may hung over their heads, the open wastes were golden with furze and broom; their horses' hoofs trod on "sheets of hyacinth,"

"That seemed the heavens upbreking through the earth"

though "Guinevere" was not yet written to help them to put the picture into words, as they cantered up a riding leading to a row of hutches in a sheltered place, where the little pheasants were rushing in and out to their foster-mothers the hens, among the wood anemones in "the copse which must be cut next year."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXCEPTIONABLE MARRIAGE.

“Colours seen by candlelight
Do not look the same by day.”

MRS. BROWNING.

IN the following month, the *Morning Post* announced “the preliminaries of a matrimonial alliance, &c. . . . between Captain Dimsdale and the only daughter of Lord Cannondale.” The Honourable Alicia was not a person to be vulgarly “married.” She was not charming and not accomplished, and even her best friends could not say that she was very wise; but she was rather pretty, and would have £80,000, and the world considered that Captain Dimsdale had done exceedingly well for himself.

“One can’t have everything,” he said, philosophically, to himself, as he prepared to announce the fact to his father. The marriage was so unexceptionable that he hardly went through the form even of asking his consent. “She isn’t very clever,” added the passionate lover, musing; “but that doesn’t much signify. I think I can manage.”

Hastings had sown and reaped his wild oats (or rather his father had done the last for him) and he was settling down into a "very sensible man." He had been exceedingly spoilt by the world, and was naturally indolent, so that he made scarcely any use of the very good abilities with which nature had most superfluously gifted him. His theory of life was to get through existence with as few annoyances as possible; and as at the present moment the absence of money was perhaps the most serious of his troubles, he caught gladly at so pleasant a solution of them.

Lord Cannondale was the son of a very keen-witted old law-lord, who had risen from the ranks to very near the top of the tree. Nature seemed to have revenged herself for her prodigality to the father by giving the son rather less sense than other folk. "The only clever thing that he is ever known to have done was marrying all this money in tallow or oil, or some nasty smelling thing," as Cecilia observed confidentially to her husband, although she rather encouraged the marriage.

"I hope it is all right," replied her husband, a little doubtfully; "but it seems to me as if the 'Honourable Alicia' inherited from both parents in more senses than one."

At Fernyhurst the news was received favourably.

The Seymours were on the whole satisfied ; Mrs. Dimsdale trusted Cecilia, and took a bright view of the affair, and Mr. Dimsdale said nothing against it. But after Hastings had himself been down to his home, his father, out as usual with May one day under the shadow of his big trees, unbosomed himself to his ordinary confidante.

“I wish that Hastings were not so desperately sensible about it. I suppose it is not the fashion nowadays to be in love ; it is a pity. It wasn’t such a bad fashion after all,” said the old man. “When I married your mother, she was a very pretty girl without as many pounds as this young lady has thousands ; but I should not have been very patient with the man who thought there was anything wanting in her. I’m sure I’m so hampered for money, that I’m glad enough Hastings will have some ; but I wish he didn’t think so much about it.”

The Cannondale invitations, of course, included the whole family ; but Mrs. Dimsdale now never left home, and the Squire wrote such a doleful picture of his infirmities to excuse himself from a visit before the marriage—he who was out on horseback or on foot every day, wet and dry—as greatly amused May, who was to represent the family meantime with Tom. It came to pass, however, that one day

after her village excursions, she was not only taken ill, but was declared to have that most unheroic malady—the measles. She was young enough to have preferred a sprained ancle, or even a broken bone—anything, less uninteresting—and she went out so seldom, that it was a great sorrow to her to give up her bridal festivities. There was no help for her, however. People are as shy of the measles as of the plague.

Now, the Honourable Alicia had been very anxious to impress and dazzle her future relations, and her annoyance was great when Tom appeared alone with his apologies.

“But why did she go among the cottages at all at such an important time?” said the young lady with rather a sharp note in her voice, and a doubtful look about the mouth.

Tom was a good deal taken aback; but he was too loyal to his brother to repeat anything unpleasant which he had seen, and he kept his surmises to himself.

The Squire went up to London in due time for the wedding itself; but there was not much information to be gathered from him by his family on his return as to the lady; and as Alicia declared that it was impossible to go near what she called an infected house, and the season was growing late for Italy,

the bride and bridegroom went abroad without paying their respects at Fernyhurst, and it was not for several months after the marriage that their visit there came to pass.

Alicia had forgotten her grievances, however, and was in high good-humour as they drove through the pretty lodges and up and down the undulations of the beautiful park.

"I shall like to live here very much," she said graciously to her husband. "You hadn't told me how handsome it all was," she went on, putting out her head, as they came up to the house, which had been altered and enlarged, and improved by successive generations, into a very picturesque pile of building, and she entered it with a full intention of being "sweetly condescending" to everybody.

The old Squire, with a little grandson hanging on to his hand, received her in a very patriarchal fashion at the entrance-door. They passed together up the hall, which was, in fact, a long low room, its ceiling crossed by many beams, and called "the gallery," which stretched nearly the whole length of the house. Bits of armour, dim-eyed portraits were fastened against the wainscoted walls, with here and there a great antler, from which hung a fox's brush or two. Cases of rare birds, shot on the

estate, stood on the carved old oak and inlaid cabinets ; a number of tiger and bear skins were spread on the polished brown floor ; a billiard table occupied the further end, while round the beautiful old stone fireplace, with small emblazoned shields up the sides, were grouped some crimson velvet armchairs about an old Persian rug. It was all rich and harmonious in colour, as the evening light shone in from a queer oriel window in the corner.

“ Very comfortable and handsome indeed. The Dimsdale arms, of course ? ” said Alicia, approvingly, looking about her as the old man led her into the house. He was a shy, reserved, silent man, in general ; but when roused by any sufficient reason, no one could be more charming, and he was now exerting himself very prettily towards his new daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Dimsdale’s greeting was kind, though not so cordial as her husband’s ; and May, delighted at the prospect of her new sister, hovered round her affectionately, taking possession of her cloak, carrying her bag, all which attentions Alicia received as only proper tribute to her merits.

“ You had better go up-stairs, I think, my dear, hadn’t you ? ” said her husband presently. “ You’re always so long dressing.”

She was so long, indeed, on this occasion, that the

whole family had been for some time sitting and standing waiting for her round the drawing-room fire, which Mrs. Dimsdale's invalid habits made necessary, June though it was. And it is an additional reason for being in time for dinner, that you thereby avoid the discussion of your character, for which this is by no means a propitious moment.

"She's decidedly pretty," said Mrs. Dimsdale to the Rector, who had been summoned by the family, as usual, to help in every time of need of whatsoever kind.

"Yes, so the Squire told us after the marriage, I remember," replied he, a good deal disappointed that this still appeared to be the chief thing to be said of the future queen-consort of Fernyhurst.

Mr. Dimsdale leant back in his chair with his eyes on the door: he was somewhat hungry, and a punctual man.

"But why on earth does she wear that hideous thing on her head?" said Charlie, who had run home on purpose to make his sister-in-law's acquaintance.

"That is the very last Parisian fashion in bonnets, my dear but ignorant Charlie," said May with a smile.

"Which doesn't prevent its being exceedingly ugly," yawned he.

"But it makes the woman mind unable to see it," retorted Tom.

"Not original, dear. He's only cribbing from Walter Scrope, I assure you, Mr. Drayton," May went on, turning to her old friend, and trying to laugh, but a little drearily, for her heart was rather sore.

She had worked herself up into believing that Alicia's arrival would be a great pleasure in her life, and the blank which she now foresaw had already begun to be painful, as the door opened, and Alicia came sweeping in on her husband's arm with a very scanty measure of apology for keeping them all waiting so long.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HONOURABLE A.

"She's unfolding a tale of herself, I surmise,
For 'tis dotted as thick as a peacock's with I's."

LOWELL.

THE procession moved in rather solemnly to dinner. Alicia's gown was exceedingly smart, indeed, if anything, a little too much so for the occasion; but it may be doubted whether any amount of fine gowns is ever considered by the patients as a sufficient compensation for the bore of waiting for them. Dinner, however, passed off pretty well: the conversation was general, the young ones laughed, Mr. Dimsdale and the Rector were eager as usual in discussing their many interests, while all that she had seen and done abroad served for Alicia to dilate on to the company.

"That's Marie Antoinette, of course," said she at last, rather consequentially, as she looked up during a general pause at a Vandyke of some ancient Dimsdale which hung opposite to her. "Oh! I

thought so because of the dress, you know," she insisted when it was explained to her.

"Henrietta Maria, you meant," suggested some one to help her out.

"No," answered she authoritatively, "the dress is that of Marie Antoinette."

"You saw those magnificent Vandykes at Genoa? I think they are the finest in Europe," said Mr. Drayton, who sat next Alicia; he was a little deaf, but followed as he thought the direction of her eyes.

"Yes, I daresay they are; but I was sick of pictures, we saw such heaps," replied she.

At dessert the small Hugh appeared. He listened with open ears to Alicia's somewhat florid description of her father's horses, into which she had branched *apropos* to the bad posting that they had endured in Italy. All this, being the son of a master of hounds, greatly interested his small mind, though he sat very quietly on his uncle Charlie's knee, whom he looked upon as the chief of men, watching the making of a face upon an orange, eyes, nose, and mouth cut out on the inner peel, "and a pip in his mouth, Uncle Charlie," he advised anxiously.

As soon as the ladies, however, were gone, the *enfant terrible* began in a loud whisper,—

"Were those horses which that lady——"

"The Honourable A 1," said Charlie.

"Now don't be mischievous," hinted the more prudent Tom.

"The Honourable A 1," said Hugh, delighted with the savour of wrong-doing, though he did not in the least know in what it consisted. "Were those horses the same which Uncle Tom said were such screws that they weren't fit for a hackney coach?"

"Now run away, Hugh; you've got your orange, and it's quite time you should be in bed," said Tom, half amused, but a good deal afraid of vexing his brother.

Captain Dimsdale looked a little annoyed, turned away, and began to talk to his father and Mr. Drayton, who, however, went away soon after dinner was over in rather a depressed state of mind.

"Her very voice is enough!" muttered the fastidious old man to himself, as the hall-door closed behind him; "it is an obstinate voice, and an uncultivated voice!"

In the drawing-room, when the gentlemen entered, they found Mrs. Dimsdale hardly out of her siesta, and her daughter-in-law sitting beside her, recounting the grandeurs of her past and her intentions for the future.

"Thank you, we cannot stay beyond the end of

the week. I want to get back to London for the next Drawing-room. I thought of asking Cecilia Seymour to present me, but I find my mother has already arranged with the Dowager Duchess of Dinmont, and therefore you know I assure you my mother and I created quite a sensation at the last Drawing-room." (Which was perfectly true: Lady Cannondale, who was large and red, had appeared in a *parure* of peacocks' feathers, which had delighted the whole court, from the Queen downwards, and had been taken by the ignorant public for the Lady Mayoress, who happened to be a very lady-like little woman.) "It is usual to be presented again, you know, upon one's marriage. The long line of ladies——"

"Are you explaining a Drawing-room to me, my dear?" said the stately old lady somewhat sternly, looking curiously at her as she leant forward without moving a muscle of her countenance.

"My dear Alicia, what are you talking about?" interposed her husband; "my mother was going to Drawing-rooms and court balls long before you were born."

"Oh, indeed! I thought as you didn't go to London, you know," said his wife, a little taken aback and silenced for a moment; but she recovered herself,

and began on May with renewed dignity. "My dear May," she said patronisingly, "I shall have great pleasure in introducing you to some of the best society when next you come up to London. I suppose you go to Cecilia's house sometimes.

"Thank you," said May, a good deal surprised; "I very seldom leave home, and when I do my sister takes me out with her. I'm much obliged to you, however, for thinking of me," she exerted herself to add; and then she called up Charlie to the rescue, who was able to launch forth on the balls at Naples, where the fleet had fortunately happened to dance at the same time as Alicia.

She next undertook the Squire, who came up at the moment with his kindly courtesy to sit by her, and she began on politics, as best suited to his capacity.

"A Liberal!—the Corn Laws—ah, yes, some people may do as they please; but, of course, *we* are Conservatives; the aristocracy must, you know, feel strongly on such points, and hang together in defence of their privileges."

At night Captain Dimsdale came moodily into his wife's room as soon as she had dismissed her maid.

"I wish, Alicia, you would try and be a little more careful. You have a perfect talent for always

saying the wrong thing. What did you mean by explaining Drawing-rooms to my mother, and proposing to introduce my sister into 'good society?' They're used to much better society than you are."

"I'm sure I was exceedingly kind and considerate to them all to-day," said she with dignity.

"And then all that stupid cackle about your father's position, and 'dignity,' and 'horses,' as if nobody had ever had four horses before." (Hastings was a little sore when he remembered why they did not now exist at Fernyhurst.) "The very baby was quizzing you. Why, those brutes are a laughing-stock in the county, as I saw Tom must have told them."

"I hate Tom," said she.

"And to my dear old father, too, of all people, with his modest ways, who never prided himself on anything in all his life. 'My family must be Conservative!'—if you do want to vaunt yourself, why don't you go in for its having raised itself from the ranks? 'The aristocracy hang together;' 'my father's important position!'—intolerable bosh!" said Captain Dimsdale, walking up and down as he worked himself into a passion.

"And so ours is a fine position; and *we* are a noble family, which you ain't," replied his wife, not understanding him in the least.

“Good heavens, Alicia! do you mean to say that you don’t know that your grandfather’s peerage is twelve years old, and that he was a tailor’s son?”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” she answered angrily.

“And that the Dimsdales came in with the Conquest?”

“And I’m sure I don’t care when they got in,” she replied.

Captain Dimsdale felt his own bathos; he was strong in the attack, but if once he came to recounting his own glories, it was all up with him, and he fell to her level.

“I declare you’ll make me as bad as yourself,” he muttered as he lounged out of the room again with less than his usual indolent *insouciance*. He had found that a silly woman was not so easy to manage as he intended, even by so exceedingly sensible a man. There is no convincing a fool. No impression can be made upon her, she returns like water again to the same point; and there is no misreckoning like that of the man who marries such an one with the hope of having his own way.

The next morning Mrs. Hastings was more silent, but also more sulky, which was hardly an improvement upon the naive condescension of the evening

before. She sat in state in the drawing-room with a large piece of carpet work, hideous with flowers, impossible in drawing, and rawest and gaudiest in colour, which bore signs of having been very long on hand. She had evidently expected the family to be in attendance, and was rather cross with May, her only companion. Tom and Charlie had started off, however, almost before breakfast was over.

"I may have the dog-cart and the grey mare, papa? I want to drive Tom over to the Blunts?" Charlie's cosmopolitan sympathies had friends all over the county whom the rest of the family knew nothing about.

"Yes," said his father, with his grave smile, "if Tom does not value his neck more than I'm doing the chances for the mare's knees."

"Charlie's driving is like the driving of Jehu," May explained to Alicia.

"No, May, not quite, because Jehu drove very well, I fancy," interposed Tom.

May found the morning long. Hastings had disappeared, her father had gone to his business, and it was heavy work trying to amuse or interest her sister-in-law. Later, however, a number of visitors came in, which assisted matters a good deal. Alicia liked all manner of movement, so that when Mr. Drayton

looked in later to see if he could give any help, he found her the centre of quite a large party, and her rather loud, inharmonious voice pouring forth a staccato passage, as it were, of I's and me's.

"I don't think that I have heard so many in the Fernyhurst drawing-room in all this thirty years put together," said the Rector to himself as he paid his *devoirs* to the bride, and then came up to where Mrs. Dimsdale was sitting in rather gloomy though mute contemplation of the cross-stitch which had just been paraded for her admiration.

"A yard of Brussels carpeting would be so much better-looking!" groaned the old lady aside. There was a very keen sense of beauty and art at Fernyhurst.

"I can't think why ladies' work should always be so ugly," said Mr. Drayton innocently. "When one sees what unlimited time and patience will produce, too, in the East. That is quite a work of art now," he went on, peering with his short-sighted eyes at an Indian shawl which May had just brought up for her mother. "I wonder why English ladies shouldn't do as well as Indian Ryots!"

"You must have some knowledge of form and feeling for colour," said Mrs. Dimsdale, smiling.

"And why can't they draw their own patterns, as

I always tell Sophia; I should have thought that the best part of the concern," he went on.

"It is not so easy. I'm always trying and failing," declared May.

"But then the failures of an artist and an educated woman have character and an idea in them, whereas things out of a shop are by their nature, of a shop shoppy," observed Mr. Drayton.

"I always get my patterns at the best shops," Alicia was saying complacently to the company at large as she took up her work again after it had made its round, too fully convinced of the admiration it must excite to require any expression of it, and too busy as usual in attending to her own voice to hear anything else that was going on. "They are very expensive," she went on patronisingly to the curate's wife, "but I hate all home-made fid-fads, you know."

Things were going on tolerably easily, when presently a lady came in, whose parties in London Alicia knew that her mother had vainly attempted to compass, and she put herself into the forefront of the battle for attention, as if the visit had been intended chiefly to her. Lady St. Maur, however, turned away to her old friends almost immediately after the necessary civilities, discussed the merits of

every bath in Germany fit for Mrs. Dimsdale's ailments, and pressed May to come over to them, without attending much to Alicia. "You promised before we went to Wiesbaden, and here am I obliged to hunt you up again, May. Drive over to luncheon, if you can't be spared at night. The man who knows most about Spanish art in all England is coming to us, and I want you to meet him, my dear," said she, kindly, as she left the room.

"I am very glad that you know that sort of people," said the Honourable A., a little crossly.

"I'm afraid, dear, that Hastings did not give at all a good report of us; and that you expected to find us still in the ancient Briton stage in these woods," answered May, laughing.

But Alicia grew solemn; she resented a joke as a sort of personal affront.

Every evening Fernyhurst had a dinner of the neighbours round, and the bride came down in a finer gown every night, which was evidently a comfort to her. She was paid proper attention to, and took possession as it were of the situation, the house, and the company. But, altogether, the time wore slowly away to all. She had no interest except in herself, her grandeur, and the fine people whom she knew, and having intended kindly to patronise the Dimsdales,

her slow perceptions found it difficult to take up any other idea.

She had taken an absurd dislike to Hugh, who returned it in kind, and his baby thrusts went home sometimes in a way which tried the self-command of the family. At last the happy day of release arrived, and the old Squire put her into the carriage with a sigh of relief. His chivalry had been sorely tried, but he preserved it to the end intact.

"I can't say I much like your family, Hastings," said his wife, ungraciously, as they drove away—"except your father, and he's a dear old man. What a wonderful fancy he has taken for me, to be sure! I'm a prime favourite of his, evidently!"

Hastings looked out silently from the carriage window and whistled—not by any means from "want of thought."

As the servants retired after the hall door was shut, and the Squire vanished into his own room, Charlie seized Tom round the waist, and careered in a mad gallop round the billiard table, with loud cries of, "*Alfin respiro.*" "Really, Mr. Dimsdale," said he, stopping at the drawing-room door, and spreading out imaginary petticoats, as he tripped gracefully across the room with a delicate mince ("I can make a much better young lady than *you*,

May. See how I manage my crinoline!" said he, aside), "Really, my dear sir, my father's horses are so much finer than other people's (being as he is a peer), and his hogs, dogs, cocks, and geese are so *very* superior, that I must beg leave to differ with you about the Corn Laws!"

"I can do it much better than that, Charlie!" cried Tom, sitting down in an armchair, in an elegant attitude, fanning himself with his pocket-handkerchief.

"My mother was saying to the 'Duchess-Countess' one day, 'The heat of the weather really makes me very warm;' and Lord Bugaboo, who happened to be present at the time, observed——"

"Now, don't be bad boys," said May, coming up behind him, and putting her two arms round his neck, and her fingers on his mouth. "Leave her alone, we must make the best of her, for Hastings' sake; and don't let us talk to papa or mamma about her, it will only vex them."

"Well, least said soonest mended, I dare say," said Charlie; "but it strikes me there isn't much to tell the governor. I caught a shrewd glance out of his eye sometimes, though he is much too chivalrous to say what he thinks."

And, in spite of her efforts at wisdom, May could

not help feeling grateful for the hearty laugh which had taken the sting out of the trials to her taste and feelings which she had been going through for the last few days.

It was very true, though the Squire never mentioned the subject, that he had formed a very distinct opinion on the matter; but, "silent as we grow when feeling most," he did not utter it—only once May heard him mutter sadly to himself, even in the interest of digging a new well for a cottage, "you may pay too dear—you may pay too dear—even for getting what you want."

In fact, poor Hastings had made but a bad bargain with Mammon. His father-in-law had not much besides his wife's fortune, and wanted all his money for himself. He made his daughter but a small allowance, and the Dimsdales lived on in a little house in London constantly complaining of their poverty. They were at liberty to go and stay with the Cannondales if they pleased, but against this all the good as well as the evil in Hastings rebelled. He could not stand his mother-in-law with her airs and aristocratic pretensions. He had been brought up in a well-ordered household, where the show was less than the reality. His mother was not a particularly interesting woman, but she was a

thorough lady, and would as soon have thought of boasting of her carriage and horses as of not going barefoot; of her fine house as of not having a brick-floor. She had always been used to such things, and existence did not present itself to her mind as possible in any other form—more, indeed, than without air or water.

With the Squire it was different. It never even occurred to him that there was material for a vaunt in possessions or position; they were accidentals, not him. Even his estate he always regarded as something that had come from his father, and was to go to his son; in the entailed, not the personal, light. He was too simple-minded—too high-minded—for this to be any virtue in him. His perfect simplicity gave him the appearance of very high breeding, though it sprang from a different cause. He was unconscious of self; he cared nothing for opinion; he had always been an acknowledged chief wherever he had lived; and, as Madame de Staël said of the Italians, “*Il ne faisait rien parcequ’on le regardait, et il ne s’abstenait de rien parcequ’on le regardait.*” This gave a sort of ease to his manner, in spite of his shyness, which, with his exceeding courtesy, had a great charm.

This complete independence is an important quality

in the class to which he belonged. The upper class on the Continent are seeking after place, or court position and favour, or they have retired from all political and social action, like the legitimists in France and the best educated men in America; but the landed proprietors in England, each the centre of his own little kingdom of action, form an independent element in English public life the value of which is very great. With rare exceptions, they want nothing from Government. What could a court give them?—they would think it intolerable to serve any one, even their sovereign, except in public life. The colonel of a regiment, the captain of a man-of-war, a great manufacturer, may have more despotic sway over the men under them, but it is only for a time, and over the family life of their subjects they have generally little or no control; while with the many hundred men, women, and children, more or less dependent upon the chief of even a moderate estate, the Squire's influence is felt in every detail of their material prosperity, in the gardens, the allotments, the comfort of the cottages, the relief in sickness, the sanitary measures, the schools, and, to a great extent, the moral training towards self-reliance and habits of exertion. The bad cottages and abominable nuisances, so often complained of, belong in general

to small owners of two or three houses, who depend for a living upon charging as highly and giving as little as they possibly can. The amount of unpaid work, often anxious and tedious, conscientiously performed by country gentlemen in poor-law boards, magistrates' and county business, police, &c., in the supervision of prisons, hospitals, lunatic asylums, and reformatories—the conduct of which can certainly bear a comparison with that of the same institutions in towns—gives them a local field, circumscribed in extent, but very real in its sphere of usefulness. Even granting that there is some bad political economy and some “indifferent justice” to be found among them, stipendiary magistrates do not turn out always wise, statesmen have sometimes to undo the work of their predecessors, the master manufacturers are not supposed to be altogether successful with their men.

As a class, country gentlemen have had the best education at school and college which England could afford. They have generally travelled a good deal, and are able to compare both men and countries from without with their own, which, rightly understood, is a sort of education in itself; while the management of men, politically and socially,

incomparably the best training of all, has been peculiarly theirs.

Whence come the treasures which furnish the walls of loan exhibitions and South Kensington portrait galleries but from our country houses, collected by generations of country gentlemen? The best libraries, the most beautiful collections of plants and shrubs, the curious antiquities so liberally shown, are theirs. From their ranks have sprung the leaders who have fought our battles by land and sea for hundreds of years—Sidney, Raleigh, Marlborough, Wellesley, Clive, Howe, Anson, and the Napiers. And when the public has required other kinds of service, Pym, Hampden, and Sir John Eliot were not wanting in their ranks; while in later times, and for different needs, what were Pitt and Fox, Lord Derby and Lord Palmerston, but country gentlemen born and bred? They will no longer have the same monopoly of the conduct of the state. Other classes have come rightfully “to the fore,” and have both the education and the energy to use their right; but the honour of England has not suffered in the hands of what Mr. Gladstone calls “the leisure class;” theirs has been both a dignified and a useful life.

CHAPTER XIII.

TALK UNDER THE CEDARS.

“Where once we held debate, a band
Of youthful friends, on mind and art.

When one would aim an arrow fair,
But send it slackly from the string,
And one would pierce an outer ring,
And one an inner, here and there.”

In Memoriam.

IN the following autumn a number of cousins were staying as usual at Fernyhurst. Clara had arrived from Brickwall, the small Lucy had been sent up for change of air from the Dockyard by her anxious mother, overdone and troubled as usual, and always on the move from one station to another, with a large family of boys to look after, and little rest for the soles of her feet.

Scrope and Tom had just returned from a walking tour in Switzerland during the long vacation. Tom had been reading for a fellowship, following his friend's example though without his success, while Scrope was passing through that unsatisfactory period of waiting for work (except such as he made for

himself) which most young lawyers must undergo—the weary waiting for that which often fails even in the end for many clever men.

“How can you sit in-doors this lovely day?” said Tom, looking in at the drawing-room window one hot afternoon; “come out directly, womankind, here is Scrope longing, I know, to spout poetry to you. He (not I) smuggled all these wicked Galigani editions” (it was before the days of Tauchnitz) “through the Custom House, so you’d better make him read aloud and enjoy his crimes. What will you have? Listen—Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Southey.”

There was a splendid old cedar near the house, making a whole tent of green shade, and under it the girls encamped, the flickering light and shadow playing over their bright muslins, bright faces, and glistening hair. May began to draw, Clara to crochet, while the child Lucy wandered off in company with Jumbo, Tom’s Scotch terrier. To May’s great surprise Walter chose Shelley, and read one poem after another aloud with much suppressed fervour. One is often astonished at a taste or a sentiment in a man altogether out of keeping with the rest of his character. You find afterwards that it is a bit of the atmosphere he has lived in, of the common stock of thought, as

it were, in his set or family; the opinion belongs to him, not as an individual, but as one of a class. Few men have the originality of mind to resist this, probably it is not even desirable. They are all the richer for having shared in the wave of thought and feeling which has passed over their world. "On peut être plus fin qu'un autre, mais pas plus fin que tous les autres," is true in a different sense from the proverb. A curious passion for Shelley was at that time rife in one at least of the universities—a deputation of three in a post chaise had even been sent by Cambridge to Oxford to expound the seer and proclaim the oracle.

But this piece of historical information had not reached May, and she therefore wondered as she said, "How beautiful!" in chorus with Clara—who, without much appreciation of the poetry in any way, was quite ready to admire everything on trust in such good company.

Even Tom, who was lying on his back with his straw hat over his eyes, biting a grass, and whose instincts certainly did not incline in any such direction, muttered, "How musical!"

"Exquisite!" said May at last, a little doubtfully, "but it is very morbid."

"What is morbid in it?"

"That the world is so dark," replied she, "and that injustice and misery are the rule."

"I wonder if you lived in Whitechapel," cried Walter almost angrily, "whether your views of life would be so optimistic. Those who are born on the sunny side of the wall think all talk of injustice morbid."

"Besides," said she, "art ought to raise one into a higher ideal life. I'd as lief read a police report as some of Shelley. You may be terrible, but you must not be disgusting. I want to be lifted out of the dusty road or the foggy marsh into the eternal light. Poetry should raise one into the ideal."

"That's not what I want it for," retorted Walter, "but to help me to see the ideal in this life, the general in the particular. The painter shows me the human beauty in what I take for a dirty little boy. The poet shows me the human soul inside."

"Well, then, read Shakespeare; he is healthier and truer too."

"Are you recommending Scrope the study of 'le divin Williams!' as we heard a Frenchman call him the other day?" said Tom. "I believe you could dodge him through the thirty-six plays, and I doubt whether *you* could even say their names."

"Would you like Tennyson better?" said Clara,

picking May's pocket. "Look here, she has just got his new volume, I declare."

"I hate his Eleanores and Lilians; they ain't real women, they're clouds. The ideal is very different from the unreal," declared Walter.

"There are you two skylarking again, as usual," cried Tom. "I tell you what—if either of you use the word 'morbid,' or 'art,' or 'ideal' again, I'll read you Peter Bell straight through. I've got it here, so you had better take care."

"Here is something of Tennyson's which you ought to like," said May, holding out a poem to Walter. "In Memoriam" had only just been published.

"'Perplex in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out,'"

she began.

"Give it me; I've not seen that yet," replied he, taking the book from her. He was so long in reading it that May looked up surprised.

"Don't you know," observed Tom sententiously, "that Scrope never does two things at a time? When he thinks he can't talk, and *vice versa*. That's why the unfortunates who fancy they know what he means by what he says are so often out. 'Speech was given to conceal thought,' says the wise man."

"How good it is to have an affectionate friend to give one a character!" answered Walter, smiling.

“ Oh, paradox-monger, isn’t what I say the literal truth? That which you think and feel is so precious that you never give it to us outside barbarians.”

“ Well, if you let off your steam in words, it won’t turn your engine.”

“ Hear, hear,” cried Tom; “ didn’t I tell you so?”

“ Isn’t there some place where one man does the Parliament talking and another the governing? ‘ For rarely should a man speak at all, unless it be to say that is to be done, and let him go and do his part in it and say no more about it.’ ‘ There is a very great necessity indeed of getting a little more silent than we are.’ ” (“ Mr. Carlyle didn’t know you,” muttered Tom, in a low voice.) “ As I read the other day, ‘ we are all going away in wind and tongue.’ ”

“ Lucy, come here directly,” interrupted Tom severely, turning to that young lady, who had just returned from the garden with a cabbage leaf full of mulberries and was administering them to the company. She had now ensconced herself close to Walter, and was putting them one by one into his mouth; while he, his head filled with his book, received the attentions with provoking unconsciousness, and eat his fruit resignedly without seeming to know whence it came.

“ Lucy, come here,” repeated Tom. “ I will not

have you flirt in that outrageous way with Mr. Scrope. You proposed only yesterday to be my little wife. If you behave in this fashion, I shall be off the bargain."

"Oh, no, Cousin Tom," said she, flitting back to his side and nestling up to him, "I like you much the best. Mr. Scrope isn't nice at all to play with. He just opens his mouth and shuts it up again, like Jumbo when I give him biscuit."

"There's a pretty character of you, Scrope! I hope you are pleased. But, Lucy, you are not to be trusted, I'm afraid," he went on gravely. "You're only a snare and a delusion. I heard you tell Charlie last week that you liked *him* best. Now what am I to believe?"

The child looked extremely puzzled, almost distressed, but her little face cleared in a few minutes, and her mischievous black eyes shone as she said,—

"Oh, but Charlie was here *then*, you know; now he's gone away, I can't like *him* best."

"Bravo, Lucy—'Philosophy of the effect of absence on the affections, by a Flirt.'"

"Tom, how can you talk such nonsense to the child?" laughed May. "How you are spoiling her!"

"Nonsense, my dear! Why it's the most luminous sense, compared to all that Scrope and you have

been pouring out for the last half hour! Listen, Lucy, isn't this pretty about Peter Bell's donkey?—

‘Only the ass with motion dull,
Upon the pivot of his skull,
Turned round his long left ear!’ ”

he read solemnly.

“Oh, how nice! read me some more,” cried she, capering round him.

“Ladies and gentlemen, do you know what o'clock it is?” said Walter, rising from the ground and stretching himself. “Ten minutes to dinner, and the Squire the most punctual of men.”

He was exceedingly fond of Mr. Dimsdale, and the extreme contrast between them only seemed to make them better friends.

“Privateer rig, I can tell you all,” shouted Tom as they rushed up-stairs their different ways at racing speed.

Twice that evening Tom heard Walter repeating to himself what sounded like the remainder of the Tennyson verse,—

“There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

“What did Mr. Scrope mean about Whitechapel?” said May curiously to her brother. “How does he know anything about it?”

“Oh, he has got some crotchets or conundrums of his own down there, I don’t quite know what—a ragged school or something. I shall go and look it up next time I’m in London,” replied he rather importantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GIRL'S PERPLEXITIES.

"For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind."

Guinevere.

A YEAR had passed away, and they were all more than a year older in many ways. Tom's profession had been somewhat uncertain. There was a large living in the family; but for that very reason his father had never urged him to go into the Church. Besides this high-minded feeling, which is commoner than is supposed, there is certainly this protection against the abuse of private patronage, that the donor is generally the first to suffer if it is wrongly given, whereas neither a Government nor a chapter are likely to be troubled in their own persons by however great a "job." As Tom's tremendous animal spirits, however, subsided, the restrictions which are demanded of a "young parson" grew less formidable in his eyes, the work more interesting, while the ambition to

distinguish himself, and the chances of success further a-field in other professions, seemed to become more shadowy and unsubstantial. There was a curious vein of common sense in the Dimsdales, an absence of the romantic and the heroic in all excepting May, which served them exceedingly well in the long run of ordinary life, and prevented their wasting strength in the search after any ideals of thought or action beyond their natural reach, which perhaps they inherited from their mother. Mr. Dimsdale, in different circumstances and with a different wife, might have been a "passionist" after many things; but the flame came out now but rarely; he had passed it on, as it were, to May,

The family gathering had taken place as usual about Christmas-tide, and it was the little half-hour before dressing for dinner, when often some of the pleasantest talk of the day takes place—no one is in a hurry—the women have not got on their fine clothes or their fine manners; the men are a little tired, and inclined to be quiet, not looking out and saying, "It is a fine day: let us go and kill something," as a Frenchman declares to be our habit in the morning in England. The young ones were sitting in the half-gloom of the gallery—a great old stamped leather screen shut in the group near the fire, making

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a mellow background with the rich browns and reds of the room. The sense of harmony of colour in the arrangements of a house is an art like music or painting, and quite as rare. It was very marked at Fernyhurst. A great Yule log on the open fire blazed fitfully as Charley fed it with fir cones from time to time, the spurts of flickering light bringing into view first one and then another suddenly—Walter plunged in one arm-chair, Tom in another, May sitting on her low stool by the fire, with her head on her hand, and Amy crouching beside her, as they talked over Tom's future ; while Milly had gone off to an old piano which, having been brought out of its retirement in the schoolroom, now stood in a distant corner of the long gallery. She was touching a few chords from time to time or singing a bar here and there, as she tried one piece of music after another in the dusk, with only the light from a small hanging lamp behind her.

"I shall run up on purpose to hear you preach, Tom," said Charlie, "whenever it comes to pass."

"I shall be very sorry for it," answered his brother. "I would rather preach before Queen, Lords, and Commons than see you opposite me on such an occasion."

"Do you remember how we used to play at preaching in old days," said May, "and what a

hurry we were always in to depose the preacher?—
‘There, that’s enough ; now let me !’”

“How often one wishes one could do the same by some of those big prozers, and give them a bit of one’s mind!” said Charlie. “I feel so inclined sometimes to say, ‘That’s more than enough ; now, let me.’ And mind, Tom, you’re not to begin preaching at us as if we were all miserable sinners, and you were suddenly released from all the failings of humanity by reason of a white tie,” added he, lifting up his coat tails, as he leant his back against the tall chimney piece.

“Well, there’s something else to be done in the matter besides preaching, and better work too ; and I mean to do it,” replied Tom, sturdily.

“It’s a grand profession !” said Amy with enthusiasm.

“Yes—sometimes,” mused Scrope : “when it is a vocation, and not ‘a profession.’”

“You’re rather hard, Mr. Scrope,” said May, in an annoyed tone.

But no answer came out of his big chair.

“Charlie,” cried Milly, from the piano far away, “if you are going to learn that second for to-night, you’d better come and begin.”

He went off quickly to her side ; but the sounds

which followed were so inharmonious that the peals of laughter which filled up the long intervals between the bars were decidedly more musical.

"Papa," said May, taking hold of her father's sleeve and detaining him affectionately, as Mr. Dimsdale walked across the gallery towards his own room and stopped for a moment by the group at the fire, "isn't it a pity? Tom says that he can't stay after to-morrow, though the examination is not till Friday."

"Cannot you really stop, my boy?" observed his father affectionately.

"I can't, indeed, papa, thank you. I'm engaged to dine with the Groves."

"I'm glad my dining days are over," said the Squire musingly. "I can't think how anybody has the courage to dine out. Just think of the risk one runs! One may be tied down with a horrible bore on each side for two hours at a stretch."

"I wonder what you go to that man's house for, Tom?" said May. "I heard him put a shy young girl to the question here one day at dinner, asking her how old her mother was, and why her uncle left the army, which he wouldn't have dared to do to an elder who could resist. I don't like him."

"Nonsense," said Tom; "why shouldn't he ask if he wants to know?"

"You oughtn't to gratify your curiosity if it hurts other folk. It's not being a gentleman."

"What does that signify? He is an honest man and a clever one," retorted Walter.

"I think it signifies a good deal," answered May; "don't you, papa?" But Mr. Dimsdale had now vanished.

"There's a great deal too much thought now about being a gentleman. Did you hear of that debate in the Union, Tom, two or three years back?"

"Not as I mean it," replied May.

"Are you quite sure you know what you *do* mean, May?" observed Tom.

"Yes, I think I do," she said slowly. "Consideration for other people—caring more for their comfort and pleasure and welfare than for one's own; sacrifice of self."

"That's not fair," growled Walter; "you're coming to the definition of something far higher."

"Well, and who did old Dekkar call 'the perfectest gentleman that ever breathed?'" said she.

"Besides, I doubt whether you would really hold to your own definition. I believe you'd find you required the fineries of your class manners, the silver-fork politenesses, over and above."

"No, I think not: fitness is all that is wanted.

There are many old people in the village whose manners are perfect; I always feel they are ladies and gentlemen in the truest sense. They are mostly old," she went on musing; "I suppose the hoary head gives dignity, and that is part of my necessary, I daresay."

"May, there's no one sets a higher value on tact and elegance and courtesies, and all that, I'm sure, than you do," remonstrated Tom.

"Ah, that's what I call being a *fine* gentleman!" laughed she; "to be sure I like it, but that's an extra—one can't be it for the wishing—high bred, not only well bred."

"And I don't like it at all. Lord Chesterfield was a beast; he wanted to make clean the outside of the platter, and didn't care whether the inside, &c., &c.," muttered Walter.

"That's not fair, as you said. Lord Chesterfield was the pinchbeck imitation of the reality. He wants you to *seem* to have all the fine sentiments which my gentleman possesses. Mine is the lineal descendant of the old Knights—the ideal Knight that is—the good that there was in chivalry, modified by the time he lives in, and the place he's born in. I dare say he eats with his knife sometimes, and that his outside and his clothes are very queer."

"He must have worn a full-bottomed wig when

he was Fénélon. Didn't you hear Mr. Drayton telling how the Archbishop one day drove home a peasant's cow which had strayed?" said Amy looking up.

"And doublet and hose when he was Falkland," followed up Walter.

"And armour when he was Sir Philip Sidney."

"And a ruff and gold chain when he was Sir Thomas More."

"And uncommonly little but blue woad, whatever Tennyson may say, when he was King Arthur," said Walter, laughing.

"Oh, so you have gone over to the enemy, have you!" put in Tom.

"I'm a lawyer," answered Walter with a smile, "not bound to have convictions. Don't you remember when Brougham was complimented on some speech which he'd just made, he said, 'Oh, I could have made such a much finer one on the other side'?"

"Uncle Dimsdale is one if ever there were," said Amy.

"And John Deedes, carpenter, another," cried May energetically.

"May," said her mother, opening the door, "come here, I want you. Where can I have put those keys: I can't find my bag, and——" The rest was lost as they both disappeared out of the room.

Somehow this time May could hardly get a good quarrel out of Walter. Even if there was a "rise," he found some most ingenious lawyer-like way of working round the point, either for himself or for her, which brought them as nearly to one mind as friends should be. She was a little annoyed and frightened, and kept as much apart from him as she could during his visit.

An evening or two after she was coming home with her cousins from a long walk over the commons to a sick woman in some cottage on the waste. The three girls were crossing the heath, threading the green lines of turfy sheep paths which wound in and out among the rough heather, and singing catches as they went. "Man's life a vapour full of woe," sounded merrily through the frosty air as they walked along—Milly leading with great vigour—when they were hailed by the shooters, Walter, Charlie, and Tom (who had only just joined them, having been virtuously reading all the morning for his examination) on their return from a wild day in the outlying covers.

"We are going to walk home with you; stop," was Tom's peremptory order. He was generally the home representative, and sometimes ordered himself accordingly.

Appropriately dolorous for your age and disposition, Miss Milly," observed Walter, gravely, as they came up.

"But why mayn't I be sad and dull as well as other people, Mr. Scrope, if I like it?" replied she, breaking down in a fit of laughing before she could reach "woe" again for the third round.

"I hope those guns aren't loaded?" asked Amy anxiously.

"All women seem to fancy a gun is a sort of wild beast," said Charlie, "which goes off" ("bites," put in Tom) "of its own accord, without the smallest provocation."

"Well, it's all very fine, but when we've had our heads blown off it won't comfort us much to hear it so nicely explained," replied Milly with a sage shake of her own pretty little article.

"It would be only the first step which costs, we know, even after that, Miss Saint Denis," observed Walter.


Their cheerful voices could be heard far away pleasantly in the still evening, and the labourers and an old wood-cutter they met on their road home turned with a smile to look after the children of the house, in whom the estate had a sort of clannish pride, as they answered their evening greetings.

Charlie was not exactly a flirt, but he never could see a petticoat, old or young, without making violent love to it ; it was as if he tried to put the concentrated essence of the months which he spent without the society of women into the fortunate half-hours which he passed in their company ; and he therefore began as usual vigorously, with both his cousins at once.

At length May dropped behind to have a little quiet talk with Tom, which she now but seldom obtained. They were lingering at the edge of the old pool where they had so often played together, watching the reflections of the crimson light behind the trees, which lay still and fair on the bright water beneath, when they found that Walter had left the others and was waiting for them, when they all turned home together, rather silently.

It was still and cold ; the youngest of young moons, hardly more than a brilliant thread, with a bright star close at hand, was shining out of " the light of a daffodil sky," which, rich below with the glow of the departed sun, faded into the pale blue ether far up in the zenith.

Tom's home would now cease to be at Fernyhurst, and May felt her brother's departure a good deal. Affection depends upon the power of feeling and the depth of the nature loving, much more than upon



the qualities of the object, and her love for Tom was far deeper and warmer than his for her.

She hardly spoke as she hung now upon his arm through the darkening wood; the path was too narrow for three, Walter dropped a little behind, and Tom, after receiving rather monosyllabic answers from both his companions, began to whistle as he switched in among the bushes, and roused the occasional rustling of a bird; otherwise the crunching of the brown crisp leaves under their feet was the only sound in their ears as they walked on under the grove of tall beech-trees, whose stems rose high in the air, and stood out dark against the glowing sky, with a beautiful cathedral-like roof of bare arching boughs over their heads. As they turned up towards the house the old steward came suddenly in sight in the gloaming, and, somewhat to May's dismay, Tom darted after him, calling out to them—

“Go on, I shall be with you directly; I must speak to Robertson about the pointer pups for Hastings.”

And May and Walter found themselves alone, which she had successfully avoided until now.

“What a lovely evening! But that's a bad omen,” she began, pointing to the moon with a nervous desire to fill up the pause, and saying the first thing that came into her head; “don't you

remember how when the squire sees 'the new mune with the old mune in hir arme,' he says—

'And much I fear, my master dear,
That we shall come to harm'?"

"Is it?" answered he a little doggedly. "But I believe in hard work, not omens—a man might win the moon even if he worked hard enough and lived long enough. To be sure, mine can't be said to have done much for me yet," he went on presently, with a short laugh. "I'm going off by the first train to-morrow. You couldn't think better of it, May," he said, hardly knowing that he used her name. "I haven't got anything much to live on yet; but if you had ever so little hope to give me, I feel as if I should be pretty sure to win that, or anything else you set your mind on."

It was an unlucky moment; her head and heart were both full of Tom; she was angry with Walter for what she called his want of sympathy with her brother in his new profession, and she was vexed at having slipped after all into the pitfall which she had been so carefully avoiding. A dismal feeling came over her that the pleasant intercourse with Walter which they had all enjoyed so long at Fernyhurst would now probably come to an end; she knew that her father had valued it as giving him fresh views

and food for thought from the outer world, into which he now went so rarely. But it could not be helped; there was not the smallest feeling of doubt in her mind upon the point, she was almost provoked at his pertinacity; "and when I thought I had been almost rude to him all this time in order to be safe!" she said to herself ruefully, as she began in a low voice with a half impatient sigh, "I hoped that we had settled all that so comfortably before, and that we understood we were to be friends and nothing more." In her extreme annoyance she hardly even felt shy.

"It isn't so easy to know when one has passed the dividing line," he said grimly. "Do you care for any one else?" he went, on as Lionel had done before him. No man or book ever thinks it possible for a woman to refuse to be married (when there is no objection to the person), unless she has lost her heart to some one else. Yet this happens in real life perpetually, where the home affections are strong, and there is occupation for all faculties of heart and mind.

"For nobody but papa and Tom," she answered quickly; but this isn't possible,—indeed, indeed, Mr. Scrope, it's quite out of the case; oh, pray put it out of your head," she went on anxiously.

In another moment Tom came suddenly on them breathless round the corner of an outhouse.

"Hullo!" said he, as he saw their discomposed faces even in the faint twilight, while Walter turned short off in silence. "What, that game's up, is it?"

"Oh, Tom, how could you go away and leave me?" cried May, almost crying, as she clung to her brother's arm.

"My dear, how could I know? I'm very sorry. Hadn't the least notion of it. And do you mean you've refused him?"

"Why, of course; for you know," said she, half-crying and half-laughing, "we have always gone on quarrelling all our lives, and hating each other. You've always said so, Tom."

"I know he has loved you from the bottom of his heart, May, and for years too. He never talked of it to me, it isn't his way, and so I never let on to him that I knew it; but it was clear enough. And you've really refused him!"

"Don't let papa hear you, Tom; here he comes," she said anxiously; "it would vex him sadly. You know he can't bear such things. He doesn't like anybody to marry anybody, you know perfectly; and I like no one half so well as you and him. I am much happier at home as I am; and then you know I am to live with you, you used always to say so."

"You know that's all nonsense," said he in a low

voice, going moodily back to the house, while May joined her father.

"I don't like that young Scrope coming here again so soon," said Mrs. Dimsdale that night to her husband. "I hope there is nothing between him and May." (Mr. Dimsdale gave a start; the idea had not come into his head.) "The thing is quite out of the case; he hasn't anything to live on, and I don't like him; he is as rough as a ploughboy in his manners. I think I shall speak to her."

"Well, it depends most upon what she likes, perhaps," answered her father musing. "I never thought of such a thing, but I do not fancy there is any danger: she likes to talk to him as I do, but she does not seem to me to care about him at all in any other way. As to his manners, he is rough enough, but I believe he is a rough diamond too; there is plenty of stuff in him under the manners. I think I would leave the thing alone. Speaking is not of much use either way, it always seems to me."

And indeed there was not much need for it; since after that day Walter Scrope's visits to Fernyhurst entirely ceased.

CHAPTER XV.

FIRELIGHT CONFIDENCES.

"When glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom."

Penseroso.

TIME passed on. As the Squire and Mrs. Dimsdale grew older, Fernyhurst was not so cheerful as it used to be. Tom had taken a curacy in an outlying poor London district to learn his work, and his visits were short. Charlie was away on a long cruise. Hastings generally now by a sort of tacit understanding came down without his wife, who paid her visits to her own people at the same time, which it is to be feared was looked upon by her husband as a double advantage.

When she did appear with her two spoilt, ugly children, the pleasure of the visit was not increased. One day the Squire openly remonstrated. "I can't stand those children, May," said the old man; "you must manage to keep them up-stairs as much as you can when they are here. That boy is a perfect nuisance; he never says anything but 'I won't,'

except when he says 'She shan't,' for the baby. And then they are so hideous!" It is a distressing fact that pretty children are suffered by public opinion to do things which in ugly ones cannot by any means be endured.

The cousinhood were sadly scattered: the Admiral had gone on a distant command; his constant wife had followed him with her two girls to Halifax, whence rumours of the conquests of the fair Milly arrived at Fernyhurst from time to time—the discomfiture of whole regiments of her Majesty's officers, Tom declared, both in the army and navy.

Clara Wilmot had married a neighbouring squire. Her extreme fear of her mother had changed into a sort of jaunty indifference, and compassion for Amy, who still remained the *souffre douleur* at home, and to whom she was always recommending rebellion. One day she had driven over to Brickwall, and was having a little talk with her sister in the garden as they paced up and down the terrace.

"I've a letter from Lionel by this mail," said she, "abusing me for not telling him more about May. He says his three years are almost up, and he wants, as usual, to hear what she is doing. I hoped he would have forgotten about her before this. She is not married, and that is all the hope I can give him,

though I'm afraid he'll take even that as encouragement."

"What is that you are saying about May?" said her mother, as they passed the book-room window, appearing unexpectedly, as was rather her wont. "I hope you are not getting up any absurd nonsense about her with your brother. I know how perfectly he agreed with me in his opinion of her, for I spoke to him about it the very evening she was here last with him."

"Why, mamma," said Clara, bursting out laughing, "is it possible you haven't got farther than that? I remember asking him that same night what he meant by seeming to agree to your attacks on May, when I knew he thought so differently; and he said he had only just nodded his head, and hadn't heard a word you'd been saying—he was so cut up by her refusal."

"Refused by May! he was a great deal too sensible to offer to her. I don't believe a word of any such thing," said Lady Wilmot angrily, as she walked majestically away; and indeed it is much the best thing to be done: when facts are so impertinent as to refuse to obey infallibility, the only thing left for infallibility is to ignore the facts altogether.

It was the more provoking, because the longer she

thought of it the more convinced she was of the truth of Clara's words. It accounted for a number of little things which she had solved by elaborate systems of her own, and now came the "simplicity of truth," and explained them all. It did not annoy her the less—here had her three children been acting under her own eye in direct opposition to her expressed desires, and she had never found out anything that was going on. "That it should be about May, too, of all people!" she repeated to herself. It was more convenient to complain of their duplicity than of her own blindness, which she did to her own perfect satisfaction.

"It is hard on mamma, when there has never been so much as a daisy about the place that she didn't give it good advice how to open its buds," Clara declared laughing. She was now beyond Lady Wilmot's power, who indeed was a little afraid of her daughter's tongue when they did meet. Poor Amy was, however, worried to an almost intolerable degree during the whole of the next week; her mother's aphorisms, and reflections, and axioms going on with remarkable vigour.

"I might just as well be without a daughter at all as be treated in this way," she ended one afternoon as she prepared to go out in the carriage.

"Shall you want me with you to-day, mamma?" said Amy gently.

"No, thank you," replied her mother loftily; "that sort of want of confidence is to me insufferable."

When she returned she found Amy, for a wonder, sitting idle in the dusk. "And that book which I begged you to take to Mrs. Giles not gone yet!" said her mother with a certain pomp of displeasure.

"Mamma, Mr. Johnson is come to stay for a few days at the rectory, and he has just been here."

"What! you don't mean to say that tiresome man is come back!—not to stay here long, I hope?" replied Lady Wilmot with, however, only her normal ungraciousness and no suspicion of the state of the case.

"He came up here to ask me—"—and Amy hesitated for a moment—"to ask me to marry him."

"Marry him! How excessively impertinent!" cried Lady Wilmot, rising up to her full breadth and height to express the size of her indignation. "What could he be thinking of? And I'm afraid, Amy, you're not to be trusted to make him feel how extremely unbecoming it was on his part to propose such a thing!" and her portly silks ruffled and rustled at the very idea.

"But, mamma," replied her daughter timidly, "I like him very much, and I accepted him."

"What!" said her mother, turning upon her with her stoniest glare, and a voice which would almost have annihilated Amy at another moment, and sunk her (morally) into the earth; but to-day she held her own in a way which surprised even herself.

"Yes, dear mother, it isn't anything new. I was very sorry when he went away last year without saying anything to me; he tells me it was because he was afraid you wouldn't listen to it, but now he's got a better curacy, and altogether——"

"Don't let me hear a word more about any such folly," replied Lady Wilmot angrily, going out of the room. Besides her annoyance at the thing itself, it was too much for her composure to be thus caught unprepared a second time within a week. But the oracle was too summary a one to succeed even for Lady Wilmot, and Amy stood her ground with the sort of quiet, persistent resolution which very timid people sometimes show when they are driven to the wall. She said very little, but it was evident that her mother's arguments (for she had so far descended from her high horse as to condescend to argue) fell off from her like so much water.

“Very obstinate in choosing to make yourself a beggar!” said Lady Wilmot; and indignant at such extraordinary and unlooked-for insubordination, she made herself at last so unpleasant that Amy took refuge in a visit to Fernyhurst, offering herself nominally to assist in nursing Mrs. Dimsdale, who was more ill than usual, and without giving any other reason for her appearance.

“Clara has had a long letter from Lionel,” said she the evening after her arrival, as the two girls sat over their fire at bed-time—May in a blue dressing-gown, Amy in the now classical red flannel—brushing their hair; an operation supposed to be favourable to confidences.

“Tell me about him,” said May rather sadly; “I have heard nothing for such a long while.”

“His time will be up now very soon. He is doing extremely well—on the staff, you know. Mamma had such a pretty message about him from the General the other day through his wife (she’s somehow a cousin of Clara’s husband), saying how capitally Lionel did his work, and how much they all valued him. He inquired a great deal about you, May, and what you were doing.” Then, after a long pause, “Do you never intend to marry, dear?” she went on, emboldened by the twilight, for May was

proud and reticent on such matters, and it was a little difficult to enter upon them with her.

"I have not made any intentions about it; but marry is a verb which requires an accusative case. I have never seen mine, that's all."

"Are you quite sure that you are not mistaken, May? You have a great deal of interest and sisterly feeling for Lionel; why should they not do as a good foundation for marriage?"

"No, I think not; the chances of jar are too many. The intercourse is too close for friendship. One must start with a hotter fire to weld two into one."

"And then, dear, are you not running the risk of having your heart turned out of house and home, as it were, towards the end of life—of starving? And may you not be sorry to have refused even half a loaf, though it be so really to you?"

"Amy, if I were to propose to you to eat your dinner now," said May, half laughing, "(as we are on feeding metaphors), because you had a long journey to make, and you might be hungry before the end, you would say, 'I don't want it. I can't give myself an appetite; I should only have an indigestion.' I cannot give myself an appetite for what I do not want now.—I cannot provide for unknown future wants. And I don't think I need

starve at all; there are always plenty of sick and sorrowing and lonely people in the world for one's heart to find food amongst, if one seeks for them. Single life may be like moonlight compared with a happy marriage, but also as bright moonlight to a foggy or stormy day compared with a great proportion of marriages."

"One requires so many qualities to be happy as a single woman," said Amy with a sigh.

"Not qualities, only the power of interest in other people and things, I think. Do you remember the manna in the wilderness? If you put by more than you wanted, it decayed. I always think there is a great truth in that. If you grasp after more sweet and pleasant things than you really want, if you 'put by' for future occasions, they perish away, and are of no use. Give us this day our daily bread of love as of everything else, that is happiness here. So now I have work enough and love enough to 'fulfil' me, as the Prayer-Book says, it cannot be right for me to grasp after more. 'Thou camest not to thy place by accident.' A single life of gossip and sourness is very horrible; but that is not necessary, is it?"

"A man shall forsake, &c., &c."

"Yes, it is a difficult point, to be settled perhaps

only in one's own mind. I don't undertake the general question ; but I cannot think it could be right to forsake positive present duties, unless at a very evident and strong call of one's affections elsewhere."

"But then, May, you cannot judge for others. You have always had a career, as it were—strong interests, objects for warm affections, liberty to carry out your own thoughts, and fancies too."

"I dare say I haven't been half grateful enough for that," answered she, musing.

"But just think of the sort of vexatious interference which so many unmarried women have to endure! 'Oh, a girl ought to be willing to sacrifice her own pleasure to every one else's!' says the world; and so her whole life is cut up into little bits: she has not even the satisfaction of seeing the ruin of her own day of much use to any one else—she has spent a pound to benefit them to the extent of a shilling. 'The public good' which, I heard Mr. Scrope once say, everybody ought to work for, would have gained by her making herself as good a tool for good work as possible. I can do nothing well—I know nothing thoroughly. If I had my bread to earn, no one ought to employ me—and why? If I sit down to work hard at something which interests me, mamma calls me down to give

out the sugar, or to write a note, or to listen to some stupid library book, which neither she nor I care about, but which 'must be sent on;' or I'm to drive regularly with her at half-past two, just when the class at the school begins, which I want to attend."

"Can't you change the time of it, dear?"

"No; for in the morning it is, 'Amy, run and see whether I have left my glasses up-stairs'—'My dear, go and speak to Mrs. Carr about the butter'—'Don't be out of the way: I shall want you in half an hour.' It is not even as if I had the interest of the responsibility of the household; no, it is all because 'it is so good for me.' If a woman's life is to be one of perpetual interference, if her time must be at some one's beck and call, I had rather it should be a husband's. A wife has rights, at least, as well as duties, in the eyes of the world. She has but one master, at all events. Don't you know how you see 'girls' of forty ordered about, and everything settled for them as if they were babies? The other day mamma consulted Clara as to whether some book was fit for me to read or not. I am two years older than Clara, and have thought, at least, as much as she has; but she's a married woman, and I am only a 'young lady.' I've accepted Mr. Johnson, May," she ended abruptly.

"My dear Amy," cried May, jumping up and putting her arms round her cousin's neck, "how could you let me go on prosing about marriages in this way when you had this great thing to tell me? Don't you know I care more about your private happiness than for all the general theories in the world?"

"Yes, but I wanted to hear what you would say."

"And you have seriously accepted him?"

"Yes, very seriously indeed; it is no laughing matter, for my mother is so angry that I don't know whether she will ever let me marry him if she can help it."

"Well, he's a good man," said May slowly.

"May, you must remember all people have not the capacity for happiness as you understand it. All that intellect, and breadth, and width, and height, and depth which you want, would be lost upon some of us."

"I didn't know you could be so sarcastic, Amy."

"Well, I don't feel like myself to-night. I am a voice crying wisdom in the wilderness, that nobody listens to, I dare say. What I mean is, 'each after his kind.' If you give a lion grain, or a cow meat, it will starve, though the food be the best of its sort. I am an exceedingly commonplace thrush; a very

commonplace garden, with very ordinary trees, will make me quite happy, and make me sing a little tune of my own, and a pleasant tune too to some people." And poor Amy's eyes filled with tears.

"Dear Amy, you know no one loves and respects and values it more than I do," answered May, with another kiss. "I was only a little afraid whether Mr. Johnson were quite worthy of his good fortune."

"When you come to know him better you won't think so," said Amy, with a smile and a tear and a blush. "You'll think I'm not nearly good enough for him."

"I wonder whether papa could get a Chancellor's living for him!" mused May thoughtfully, after being silent for a time, as she sat brooding over the fire, her long hair streaming over her in a cloud, and a pair of tongs in her hands, with which she was making little spurts of light spring out of the wood. "He hates asking anybody for anything, but I know he would do it for you, dear, and that would perhaps make Aunt Wilmot more amenable."

"And I shall write to Lionel," said Amy, smiling, after another pause, "and tell him that at all events you have laid by no accumulation of manna for future days, and that you have a great idea of the virtue and necessity of being passionately in love."

‘Petit poisson deviendra gros,’ and ‘tout vient à point à qui sait attendre.’ How prettily you used to repeat those fables when Miss Edwards inflicted French punishments upon you!”

“You’d better not do any such thing, Amy,” replied May anxiously. “‘Il ne faut pas jouer avec le feu,’ if you want a French proverb. I want to be friendly and sisterly with him. Why not? I can’t bear the idea of losing his friendship, but I don’t want any more.”

“I don’t much believe in those friendships being possible,” said her cousin sceptically, as she took her candle and went off to bed with a very sisterly kiss.

CHAPTER XVI.

FALLING LEAVES.

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks which time has made.
Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become,
As they draw near to their eternal home."

WALLER.

IT was a very trying year for May. One after another of her friends had dropped off in different directions. Her brothers and cousins were away. All the companions of her own age were scattered for one reason or another. Amy was as fond of her as ever, but the cares and anxieties of a small, poor parsonage are very engrossing ; and it had become almost impossible, in the secluded life the old people now led at Fernyhurst, for May to form any new friendships.

The children of her sister were not very interesting, and as they grew up were more and more away, while the Seymours, though they came down once or twice in the year, hardly filled up the old gaps.

And death began to tell upon the few who remained in her daily life. Poor old Nursey was the first to go, that stout old heart, loving and tender

and true, which had watched over her childhood and delighted in her youth. The tie is one which is not so strong now as of old—the interval between classes is less, but the separation between them is greater. May was with her at twelve o'clock at night, and her last words, in the vigorous tone of her old commands, as if her nursling were still a child, were, "Don't you be a-setting fire to your sleeves, dear child, with that there candle as you go down-stairs."

By morning she was dead, and May sorely missed the constant and warm affection which never failed. There is something in the feeling of elders who have known you and been kind to you from childhood which nothing can ever replace. "*Je l'aime parceque c'est lui,*" not for your talents or your virtues, or your position, but because "you are you"—a loving pride in your successes and your merits, a tender shade thrown over your faults. We never value the feeling, however, at its full worth till it has passed away, and we find ourselves in the hard outer world, judged of rigorously by what we are worth, and even that grudgingly allowed.

"May, you don't look well," said Tom on one of his now rare and rapid visits. "I shall make Cecilia ask you up to London for a little. You ought to have a change for a time; oughtn't she, papa?"

Accordingly, when the invitation arrived soon after, her father insisted on her accepting it.

Mrs. Dimsdale had been ailing for so many years that May had no fear in thus leaving her for a short time, and she was enjoying her unwonted holiday when a sudden summons arrived from Fernyhurst. Her mother was dying, and before she could reach home all was over. It was a terrible shock to her, and though she was in no wise to blame, her conscience reproached her bitterly for having been away. Conscience is an excellent constitutional sovereign, under the checks of common sense and comparison of duties, but if ever it is allowed despotic rule it is often guilty of horrible tyranny. May was harassed and tormented in a merciless way by hers, until Tom's straightforward, downright query one day, "Why, one would fancy that you thought your being here would have kept my mother alive, May: surely we haven't the reins of Providence in our hands in this way, happily," brought her humility to the rescue, and "shunted" her mind on a different rail, as it were.

The Squire felt the loss extremely. He and his wife had not been very congenial in their tastes, but they had a deep quiet fund of affection for each other; and the companion of so many years could

not be lost without an aching void. The ailing, dim life of later days was lost to his recollections, and the earlier and brighter image of the beautiful young wife by whose side he had passed through so many joys and sorrows was the only one which remained.

As often happens when a number of contemporaries have grown old together, and fall like ripe shocks of corn one after another at time of harvest, another loss was not long in following.

"I am afraid Mr. Drayton is failing fast," said the Squire sadly one day. "He told me he wasn't up to walking home with me from church this afternoon, the first time almost for above thirty years. '*Et nigra veste senescant*,'" he ended with a deep sigh. "It's well that we have none of us much time to wait down here anyhow; and happily there's least of all left for me."

It was not very long before Tom succeeded to the vacant post.

It was an interest and occupation, though a sad one, for the old man to get the Rectory into exquisite order for his son, and he used almost daily to go down there on his white pony at a foot's pace, with May generally by his side.

"It's rather slow work for old Deedes to be the

head carpenter, isn't it, papa?" said Tom one day a little impatiently. "He told me himself to-day that he was seventy-three."

"You don't mean to say that you'd have me discharge Deedes?" said his father, in the tone of utter surprise he might have used if he had been asked to divorce his wife. "Why, he has worked on the place for fifty years. He can do as good a day's work now as anybody—quietly you know, if he isn't hurried."

Live and let live was the law at Fernyhurst. When existence depends upon under-selling your neighbour three farthings upon fifty lbs., there is no room left to care for an old man's feelings; but the grinding up of men's lives in the machinery of competition has not yet taken possession of such old country homes in England: there is still a place left there for old trees and old men.

During the interval Tom went on living at the great house once more among his own people.

"Curiously like and unlike to old days," said May, smiling to herself. She found that she had to learn her brother over again; it is very different having a man, even a brother, as a guest and as a permanent resident. He was more difficult to live with than her father. Youth is intolerant and self-involved; both sympathy and many-sided interests

come generally later in life. Tom, like most young men, too, pursued his own moods without in the least calculating their effect outside. He had that curious want of power of distinguishing between bodily and mental sensations—the depression arising from the heart or from the stomach. A woman is much more accustomed to analyze her own emotions ; and moreover, if she were to be cross every time she is sick, life would become unendurable both to herself and to others. The most experienced mother or sister, however, will be often utterly perplexed at first sight to determine, when a man comes in at night, whether his deep depression arises from his having lost his whole fortune or waited too long for dinner ; whether he has heard suddenly of the death of what he loves best, or got a fit of the toothache. On the other hand, the mood goes off as quickly as it comes on. After he has comforted his soul with savoury meat, or his aches by their proper remedies, he becomes as cheerful as ever, and is perfectly unconscious that he has ever been otherwise.

“ What made you so low, dear, when you came in to-night ? ” said May a little uneasily at first, after the fashion of womankind.

“ Low, my dear ! I wasn’t a bit low. What fancies you take ! ” said Tom, after the fashion of mankind.

He was a good son and a good brother on the whole, very anxious to do his duty, but a little bit inclined, with the extreme good sense of the family, to lecture his father and sister, who were idealists very unlike himself in many matters. It was a great pleasure to May to have him once more at home as of old,—she was exceedingly fond of him,—but somehow, as life went on, they had become less and less intimate. He generally misunderstood her; and though she sometimes felt the want of the society of people of her own age, there were many things of which she could talk more readily, in which she could sympathize more warmly, with her father, who was indeed far younger than any of his sons.

Tom had made up his opinions into bundles early in life, and tied them with red or other tape, and as for the new facts and ideas which life might produce, if his arrangements were symmetrical, and his scheme of thought perfect without them, what was the use of bothering oneself by altering them? While his father, with ever new sympathy for the true, wherever it was to be found, followed it out, regardless into what difficulties the chase might lead him, “as a hawker follows his sport; at full speed, straightforwards, looking only upwards.”

The Squire's was the theoretic mind, always striving to find "the reason why," to get at the root of every matter—apt at seeing the many sides of a question—too much so, perhaps, for carrying out his thought into practice, too far-seeing to care much for the immediate small gains which the present gives alone; Tom's, the practical limited intelligence which does what it has to do, minds its own little bit of good, mends its own bit of road, without troubling about its relation to any larger horizon, and never dreaming of inventing a new or shorter line to its object. It is the conservative product of an old and settled civilisation. "*Ali al cuor*" is the motto of the first class; "*Stare super antiquas vias*" of the other; and "both's best," as the children say:—for the benefit of the world both characters are necessary. Only, as we shall never want a superabundance of the second in England, the first may be cultivated without any danger of superfluity in our climate.

CHAPTER XVII.

EBB AFTER THE TIDE.

"Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident,
It is the very place God meant for thee.
And shouldst thou there small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent,
Nor let the time thou owest to God be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightst be free
From outward hindrance or impediment."

TRENCH.

AS the months went on Mr. Dimsdale became more and more infirm, and was often confined to the house for days together. Tom had taken possession of his new home, but he was constantly in and out of Fernyhurst companionising his father, which generally included a certain amount of newspaper reading. Railways were still new enough to be subjects of interest, and one day he came upon a paragraph concerning "another railroad accident."

"Listen, May, here's a pretty story for you: 'On the newly-opened line at —— Station a little child slipped off upon the rails just as the luggage train came up, which went through without stopping; a gentleman present sprang down, flung the child

into the arms of the mother, who stood wringing her hands on the platform, and, there being no time to get up again, threw himself down upon the line, and let the train pass over him, an iron slightly grazing his shoulder. When he reappeared in safety there was a general cheer, but he retired before we (the reporter) could catch his name.' ”

“What a fine fellow !” cried May enthusiastically ; “how I should like to know who it was !”

“Hullo !” said Tom, as he looked over the paper next day, “here’s a letter about the ‘heroic action related,’ &c. ‘Courage, self-devotion’—all the rest of it, ‘eye-witness,’ &c., ‘Mr. Walter Scrope, Barrister-at-Law !’ So it was old Walter after all ! run to ground, poor fellow, when he thought he had got off so neatly. Well, May, you were all admiration yesterday. You think so little of Scrope, that I suppose now you’ll declare it was a most commonplace action, which nobody could help doing.”

“Certainly,” said May with a smile, taking up the paper, though, as there was nothing to be seen in it but the penny-a-liner’s very indifferent remarks, it might be to “give herself a countenance.” In a few minutes she got up and left the room.

“I’m sorry to have lost sight of that young fellow,” said Mr. Dimsdale drowsily, not very dis-

tinctly remembering the "passage" between Scrope and May. "I wish he would come down here again." Then soon after, "Why don't you go on reading, Tom?" he went on a little impatiently. Whereupon his son "took a header" immediately, as he told his sister afterwards, and read virtuously straight on, leaders, correspondence, foreign affairs, and all; during which performance his father fell asleep, and he went in search of his sister.

She was not to be found in the house, and he followed her into the garden. It was a sad autumn day, with a damp cold wind blowing the dead leaves about hither and thither, which,

"Yellow and black, and hectic pale and red,
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,"

as she repeated to herself, remembering their old Shelley readings under the cedars. She was getting her allowance of air, without leaving her father too long, not over-cheerfully, in a somewhat dreary constitutional duty walk.

"Well," said her brother, coming up behind her, "I'm so glad it was dear old Scrope. I'm glad that there has come an opening, a loophole—though it's a very little one—through which the world can see what a gallant fellow he is, eating his heart out in those musty chambers, failing, and struggling, and

fighting with life as he is doing, with such powers as his, when he ought to be at the head of everything if he had his due. I hate success!" and he vented his wrath on a very beautiful red-spotted fungus which came in his path, and kicked it a long way as he spoke.

"You usen't always to think so," said May, smiling at the recollection of their old fights.

"Well, but now I see what a fine time the idiots have of it in this world in most professions. Do you remember Walter saying that men get success if they care for it more than for their liberty or their convictions, and that it was the lowest test you could apply to a man or a cause? I'm sure I never could understand why he didn't succeed with you, May. I should like to know what you refused him for—you *must* have thought very well of him."

"Yes, I thought very well of him."

"And you liked him?"

"Yes, I liked him, but not in that way."

"Not in what way?"

"Tom, I can't have you cross-examining me so. One may think very highly of a man, and yet he may not be to one's taste to marry; one can't command one's love."

"One's taste, one's love!" answered Tom angrily.

“And I should like to know what one’s taste and one’s love are to be based upon! Here was one of the finest fellows in England, head of the Harrow eleven, stroke oar in our college boat—(you laugh, May; you don’t think much of that, but a man’s a good deal more of a man for it, even you will allow,” he added parenthetically)—“one who did very well at college, with as good a head-piece and as warm a heart as lives, wants to marry a girl, and she knows that she makes him miserable year after year, and then she says he isn’t to her taste! So much the worse for her taste, I say. I’d rather have had that man in the family than have been made Archbishop of Canterbury.” And though the world might think the excellent Tom not a likely candidate for the office, the wish expressed a very true and heartfelt reverence for excellence well worth winning. “But it’s no use talking, he’s forgotten all about it now, I fancy; he said he couldn’t come here for Christmas when I last saw him in town, and never so much as asked after you. Well, I must get off home, I suppose, for there’s old Marty sick, and I ought to see him before night;” and with a parting kick at the leaves and funguses, he disappeared at a long stride.

May went silently on with her walk. There was

a certain amount of truth in Tom's reproaches. In the heyday of her girl expectances, in that full belief in heroes with which a true woman starts in life, she had thrown from her what she knew was a very true, deep, earnest affection from a man whom she respected, whose character stood very high—honourable, high-minded, unselfish, with good abilities, though she did not rank them so high as Tom did,—and why? She could hardly explain to herself why. "He had not pleased her taste." What was her taste? She liked the same books as he did; she had often been startled to hear him utter in words the same thoughts which she herself had been thinking. Then what were her reasons? He had little faults of manner, he contradicted, he was rather rough; he was very thoughtful in great things, he would make painful sacrifices and take trouble for the sake of other people which few would undergo, but he was not considerate in little matters ("and trifles make the sum of human life," said May, musing to herself); he had not sufficient imagination to put himself in the place of others; he often bruised small feelings because he did not perceive their existence; besides, he offended her sometimes with his outbreaks of democratic dogmatism and with a certain bluntness about art. Moreover, he was not

only plain (May would have scorned to regard this), but he was uncouth in his look and manner. This was the amount of his shortcomings. She could find no others even after much search ; still, as these things were so, he would not have made her happy, and she knew that she was quite right to have refused him—the which she proved to herself most satisfactorily several times.

Why, then, when she reached the other end of the walk had she to begin proving it all over again, and indeed many times over afterwards ?

The fact was, as the years had run on, she had seen many men and much love-making, with herself and others, and had found out that true, earnest, faithful love does not hang on every bush for the picking ; and that high-minded, clever, good men, with or without faults of manner, are not found at every turn of the road of life. She had had her choice of two very different natures, and had refused both. She had been grand, and declared to herself that she did not want to marry. If she met the archangel Gabriel, well and good ; not else. There is such a luxury of affection, and of everything else, in extreme youth, that it throws aside as commonplace what no comparison has taught it to prize. Few minds can measure the value of that which they have

always possessed, or conceive pain which they have never themselves experienced. She was beginning now to feel that true love was worth something even when not coming from the archangel in person. Two years are to a character what distance is to a view: the great points stand out, the small features disappear. There is much to be said against London as a city, but when seen from the top of St. Paul's, you become aware of its grandeur, and forget its æsthetic crimes. The saving of the child on the railway had brought Walter's good qualities vividly before her, and she thought tenderly of the affection, which is the next thing to thinking tenderly of the man. "However" (as she always ended her reflections), "he has most likely forgotten all about it by this time, as Tom says; and as for me, if ever——" —she could hardly yet face the idea of her father's death even in thought—"I am engaged to Tom, and shall go to him, and live with him till he marries."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WOMAN'S WORK.

"All are scattered now and fled,
Some are married, some are dead ;
And when I ask with throbs of pain,
Ah ! when shall these all meet again
As in the days long since gone by ?
The ancient timepiece makes reply—
For ever, never ;
Never—for ever."

The Old Clock on the Stairs.

SHE had repeated this, and a great deal more, many times to herself one evening about a week after. Tom was gone to dine and sleep at a neighbour's house. She had finished a game at piquet with her father—she had read till she was too tired to go on, and had then played him to sleep, "sweet and low ;" and through it all the under-current of her thought had run persistently. Under the farming talk, and the discussion of the soup and the politics and the *Edinburgh Review*—although she had forced herself to be interested in them all—there had gone on the ceaseless questioning of herself, to which she got no very definite answer.

The piano stood in the corner of the dimly-lighted room. Hers was not "company play," but it helped her through many long evening hours. Her father liked nothing so well as little simple airs, which he called "warbling on the piano;" and she strayed from one plaintive volkslied and ballad to a German chorus—music which they used to sing and play in the merry old times, till the ghosts of dead joys seemed to fill the room; and all the cheerful tones of the past, the absent, the estranged, the dead, came back upon her with a sort of passionate regret, after nothing in particular, but the "brave days of old" in general, till at last she could hardly bear her own memories, and she turned to a grand "chaconne" of Jomelli's, and calmed herself with its simple, earnest, straightforward faith. "As is thy day, so shall thy strength be also," one phrase of the music seemed to say to her over and over again. And, soothed and comforted, she came back to the lighted circle near the fire, and took up her work again, and the "every day" closed in upon her once more.

"Let me see, what were we reading, dear child?" said her father, waking up. "Oh, that review of the war in Hungary. I think it is almost time to go to bed. Are you near the end?" And May was satisfied; she knew that all had been right.

Still she felt keenly sometimes that her tastes were changing a good deal. She had reached the stage in woman's life when learning for learning's sake begins to flag. The love of acquiring knowledge is generally greater in young girls than in boys, but most women are taught that their education is ended as the real education of their brothers begins. A girl is fully launched in society at eighteen.—A boy is just going to college. May had, luckily for her, not been properly "brought out;" she had been very little in London, and though she had seen a good deal of society in her father's house, yet it was in a simple, straightforward way which allowed the girl to develop after her own nature, not according to any regulation cut-and-dried pattern. But in a woman the appetite for mere facts generally dies out early. She does not often read beyond a certain point without some aim outside herself—solitary thought is rare in woman—the desire to give or to receive sympathy is the strongest part of her. She will study the driest possible subject to be of use to her father, her brother, or her husband, but as a general principle she will not make reading-absolute (as it were) the object of her life, after five or six and twenty. The life of the intellect alone will never naturally be

hers; she must live through her affections and her moral nature also. If the ordinary family food for these is wanting, if her parents are dead, and she is not married, the sick and the poor and those who are afflicted take the place to her of parents and children, and hers is a happy as well as useful life.

But whether married or single, joint action is what she is evidently fitted for by nature, with her lively sympathies and quick intuitions. There seems to be a woman's as well as a man's side in all great work, which cannot be thoroughly carried out, unless both can labour at it heartily together; *e.g.*, the administrative power which she is generally allowed to possess, enables her to assist most efficiently in the management of all philanthropic establishments—hospitals, reformatories, asylums, workhouses, &c.—where she is found to give more comfort more economically than men—to spend less with greater results.

Again, the silent share which women have contributed to the intellectual work of men is taken by them in general as simply as that of the compositor or printer's devil, and is never known except from a magnanimous man here and there, like Mr. Mill, too rich in ideas to grudge such acknowledgment. To take only a few of the instances in music,

science, metaphysics, &c., as given in lately-published biographies.—Many of the “*Lieder ohne Worte*” were composed by Fanny Mendelssohn, though at her own desire they all appeared under her brother’s name;—the assistance rendered by Miss Caroline Herschel during forty years to her brother in all his most abstruse researches;—the production by Lady Hamilton and Mrs. Austen of their husbands’ works on metaphysics and jurisprudence, left in an almost fragmentary state at their deaths;*—the help received by M. Rénan from his sister, as told in his little tribute to her memory;—these are instances from the most opposite poles of thought, taste, and powers.

We have already begun to make use of the educational powers of women on School Boards and the like, and a fair share of this part of the moral work of the world may surely be taken by them. Mr. F. Newman indeed declares that “we may well admire the instinct which made the old Germans regard woman as penetrating nearer to the mind of God than man does.” The respect, indeed, paid to the old Alruna women, and to the Sibyls and Hebrew prophetesses in other races, point all to the same idea—*i.e.*, the

* The *Edinburgh Review* says, “We are in truth indebted to these two ladies that the most profound and abstruse discussions on law and metaphysics which have appeared in our time became accessible and intelligible to the public.”

preservation of the ideal—of the moral sense of the world by means of women. How often a man is heard to complain, when a woman proposes to carry out some moral principle into action, that she is “not practical! that if she had the responsibility of doing the thing herself, she would soon give it up.” Whereas, according to this view, she is thus only fulfilling her vocation, striking the key-note, sounding the pitch, as it were—ascertaining the degree to which common life is out of tune—the distance at which practice lingers behind absolute right. The myth of Egeria is the poetic form of many a prosaic reality.

Through all phases of persecution, Pagan, Catholic, and Protestant alike, women have never been found wanting. They can show a full share of martyrs for all faiths, for all causes—even political ones, for which they are generally supposed not to care. It was observed in the French Revolution that the women suffered for their opinions as gallantly as the men, without ever for a moment putting forward their sex as a reason for exemption from death. A woman will cling most courageously to what she believes to be a principle; but in consequence of her poor education, of the extreme narrowness of her horizon, it is too often on some wretched little

scruple, which she mistakes for it and dignifies with the name, that she wastes her energies. She worries her husband or her grown-up son for some silly little tithe of anise and cummin, while the weighty matters of God's great laws of right and wrong are invisible to her poor, loving, short-sighted eyes. Yet they are uninteresting only because unknown, and a high-minded woman is generally less drawn aside by worldly considerations than even a high-minded man. She is more willing to make quiet every-day sacrifices for the right—to endure for righteousness' sake.

The power wielded by women, from the lowest to the highest, is at present so great that if men at all realised its extent, they would for their own purposes insist on their being better qualified to use it. Among the cottagers it is the woman who accomplishes that marvellous balance of expenses by which a whole family is fed and clothed during a week at the cost of a gentleman's single dinner. "I'll ask my missis" is no form of speech in a class which never stands upon compliments, but a plain truth; the domestic rule does lie in the hands of the missis. And in the upper class the welfare of the household and of the children, up to eight or nine years of age, is almost exclusively with her. Indeed, if any man

will candidly confess to himself the amount of influence which has been exercised over his life, at all ages, by women old and young, the opinions modified, the incentives supplied by them, he will be almost appalled at the thought of the way in which these potent beings have, for the most part, been left to pick up what education they could from an ignorant governess or an indifferent school; while their ideas of right and wrong, of religion and morality, have been generally obtained by being carefully kept from hearing that there is another side to any question. Whereas their brains being larger in proportion to their bodies than those of men, and their temperaments more sensitive, they require good education for their guidance even more than the other sex.

The double power which the united action of men and women brings forth is hinted at in "Guinevere," and the reason given for the failure of Arthur is the failure of his wife. If he could have found—

"A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, indeed,
The twain together well might change the world."

"Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."

Mr. Tennyson has insisted on the "diverse" nature of men and women in lines which have

become almost hackneyed by constant use, and therefore this forecast of the joint action which shall make both more strong, the division of the work of the world between them, each supplying the deficiencies, not usurping the functions of the other sex, is the more important. And, probably, not till this has been fully carried out in all work, can we expect that man shall indeed "have power on this dead world to make it live," as the Creator of both men and women seems to have intended for the benefit of all.

May had suffered neither by the neglect nor by the distortion of her life; it had been a full, a useful, and a loving one. But the high tide of occupation, influence, and affection was now slipping fast away from her. There was a blank more or less before her in the future; to which it was, however, of no use to look forward—she had only to work on in trust.

CHAPTER XIX.

A "MARIAGE DE RAISON."

"For woman is not undevelop't man,
But diverse." *The Princess.*

THE next day Tom appeared in the afternoon to sit with his father as usual. "I want to speak to you, May, as soon as I've done reading," said he in a whisper, behind the broad sheet of the *Times*. "Go into the yew-tree walk and wait for me."

"Has he anything to tell me about Walter Scrope?" said May to herself, as she put a bunch of late roses into a vase for her father's room. He scarcely knew one flower from another, but he liked the feeling of care implied by the act, and the sense of art and love of colour were gratified; the sight pleases the eye and varies the thoughts of the sick even when they are unconscious of it. Presently she heard Tom's rapid stride, and he had taken hold of her arm almost before she got down the garden steps.

"I found the Longmores staying at Stapleton, May," said he.

"So you told us," she answered rather wearily.

"I believe they have felt Mr. Drayton's death very much, but they really do——" Before, however, she could finish her sentence Tom went on—

"You know, May, it is very dull living in that house all alone, and there ought to be somebody to look after the schools and the old women now that you're so much shut up; and altogether . . . you see—I've asked Sophia to marry me."

"Sophia Longmore!" cried she in blank dismay.

"Yes, Sophia. Why not? I thought you'd be so pleased. She's a good girl, and she's very nice-looking and like a lady, and she'll have the ten thousand pounds which Mr. Drayton left them."

This was all true in a certain sense. There was no doubt that she had at least these three excellent qualities, but her head and heart were both of them narrow and small; and May knew that she would drag down her brother instead of raising him.

"I'm sure I care for nothing but your happiness, Tom, and if she makes it, I shall be glad with all my heart. But it was a little sudden. I was rather startled. We had always talked of living together," said she, with an anxious attempt at a smile.

"Well," cried Tom impatiently, in a somewhat

aggrieved tone, "and so we shall; and a great deal happier you will be with such a companion and friend. You wouldn't have liked at all to be tied always to me; besides, I don't want you to be an old maid."

And the excellent Tom had almost persuaded himself, as he spoke, that he was marrying at a great personal sacrifice purely for the advantage of giving his sister a home.

"Tell me about it, dear," said May more cheerfully, pressing his arm and feeling that she had received the communication a little ungraciously. "How did it all happen?"

She had always sincerely believed herself to be anxious for her brother's marriage, but somehow it is one of those things, charming in the abstract, which in the concrete is pretty nearly always sure, with the best intentions, to seem a little distasteful and ill-timed.

His share of the performance was soon told, and May guessed the remainder pretty accurately. Mrs. Longmore had inquired tenderly after her "beloved brother's loved parish;" Sophia had followed it up more delicately. How did the dear little ones in the infant school go on, and how was old Betty Martin's bad leg? What a charming spot the

Rectory was! Sophia did not believe that there was a more perfect place in England than her dear uncle's garden and lawn; and then she sighed, and said that she had not seen it since . . . Till poor Tom, bewildered by his sudden conscientious conviction that the "dear little children" were now a good deal neglected since May had been so much confined to her father's room, and knowing how much he was bored by Betty Martin's elaborate description of her woes, touched by the sadness depicted in the fair Peri's face thus shut outside her paradise, suddenly made up his mind—slept on it characteristically with his sensible temper, in order not to feel in too great a hurry—with the cautious manner some men have of doing rash things—ate his breakfast on it, proposed, and was rapturously accepted on the garden steps next morning before he started home.

"My darling child was born for a parish priestess," said Mrs. Longmore with a sob of delight; "and her uncle having left us his fortune, seems to make it so appropriate for her to live and do good in his own beloved parish; and my brother-in-law, the canon, has always said that there was no one better fitted . . . interesting duties connected . . ." Mrs. Longmore's emotions were of the most voluminous and gushing kind on the occasion.

"But I don't mean to marry Mrs. Longmore into the bargain, May, you may be quite sure," said Tom one day in a sudden fit of decision.

May smiled her answer; it is more convenient when assent is all that is required, and you have not a very confident one to give.

CHAPTER XX.

CONSTANCY.

“Nought shall endure but only mutability.”

SHELLEY.

“IT’S no use putting off anything for my sake, Tom,” said his father when he heard the news. “Now you’ve made up your mind, marry her as fast as you can. It would be a satisfaction to me to know that you were settled and had a comfortable home for *her*,” said he, with a tender look at May, who could scarcely bear it, and turned away.

There was a great gathering at Mrs. Longmore’s; bishop officiating, canon assisting, all the proper ceremonies, ecclesiastical and other—everything that was honourable and elaborate; but Mr. Dimsdale was too ill to leave home, and May was not sorry for the excuse, by which she was able to reduce her share in the festivities to the smallest possible amount consistent with her love for her brother.

Tom had written to ask Walter Scrope to his wedding: he responded very warmly, but his uncle had just died, and his father had a lawsuit con-

ty with the heir, whom
could not get away
it. His mother
me down and
did May to
n't wish it—
reason why he

better than May had
was concerned. Sophia
eat house, which even the
the canon" could not coun-
her best for her husband, and
to his father and sister, and
to her for her good desires, if her
all. She was not quite so silly either
life does something to teach the well-
(though wonderfully little with some
; and she worked at the children and
after the old people of the village as
nestly as if she had been a wiser woman.

All that winter the old man had his children more
or less about him. And May sat on day after day
by her father's side. Sometimes he got out for a
little drive, or a few steps on the terrace—they

were always together. She read, and she discussed, and she companionised both his thoughts and his feelings; but "with every gust some leaves did fall" out of his few remaining days; and life was beginning with her to mean looking back, which is always very sad to see in the young.

She loved him with an entire and tender love. "La vieillesse est rarement aimable, parceque c'est l'époque de la vie où il n'est plus possible de cacher aucun défaut; mais l'homme que le temps n'a point abattu en a reçu des présens que lui seul peut faire;" says Madame de Stäel,—the quiet sagacity, the large-minded charity, the disinterested affection to be found in such an old age. "La tendresse que vous inspire un tel parent est la plus profonde de toutes. Il réunit sur vous tous les genres de sentimens, il vous protège comme si vous étiez un enfant, vous lui plaisez comme si vous étiez toujours jeune, il se confie à vous comme si vous aviez atteint l'âge de la maturité," she goes on, with a tender feeling born of her own respect and affection for her father.

It had been an exceedingly rainy day, dark, and sad, and dreary. With the Squire's out-of-door habits, his confinement to the house was very irksome to him. He was patient, but May had found it more than usually difficult all the afternoon to keep him

cheerful, when at last she heard Tom's voice in the gallery, and her face lighted up as it always did at that, to her, welcome sound. He came in to them looking cheery, though dripping wet; it was like a breath of mental fresh air entering in the room.

"You look like the deceased Jumbo fresh out of the pond. But you mustn't sit in those wet things," said May, laughing, as she tried to take off his coat.

"I can't stay, and a wet coat will do me no more harm than it did Jumbo," answered he.

"I know I wish I could get wet through again," sighed the Squire a little ruefully; and then recovering himself he went on with a smile, "We shall have to lay down drain-tiles in the drawing-room floor after you, my boy, presently."

"I've brought you the letters from the second post, papa, as I happened to be in the town; more by token that there's one from Charlie to May. What does he say? he hasn't written to me I don't know when. What a long and doleful epistle!" he went on, looking over his sister's shoulder as she read.

"Wait for your turn: who knows what secrets there may not be in it?" said she laughing.

"So poor Charlie's hard hit," replied he, keeping hold of his corner of the letter, and without attending to her. He was a boy still in his father's house,

however much in other eyes he was the reverend rector of the parish. "So he's fallen a victim to Miss Milly's charms! I thought how it would be, and he on board the Admiral's ship, when we heard about all those receptions and dinings out at Halifax. Do you remember that dreadful duet he was always practising with her the winter they were here together before they all sailed, and which died in the bud? I'm sure that excruciating was not word enough for the noise he made."

"Poor old Charlie, what a disconsolate letter!" said May compassionately. "I never thought that he'd have taken any one girl's loss so much to heart—tenderly flirting with six young ladies at once, as he has always been till now; besides knowing, as he does, how strict my uncle is, and how determined against all cousins' marriages."

"I had set my whole heart upon her, and at my age it's not very likely I can ever care for any one else in this way again," wrote Charlie with that nice appreciation of his own character which young gentlemen so often show on such occasions.

"I think I've heard that 'sintiment' once or twice before," observed the Squire with his quiet smile. "I hope that it may be still possible for comfort to return even to the afflicted Charlie!"

"Here's a little bit of a later date still," said Tom, picking up a piece of the letter which had fallen to the ground.

"Halloo!" cried he as he read on; "no wonder Milly refused him, she's engaged herself to Lionel! Just fancy, the grave, the prudent, the sensible, virtuous, the preux chevalier Lionel to be caught by that little damsel, who would flirt with the tongs rather than keep her eyes quiet; seventeen and twenty-nine too. What can my uncle be thinking about to allow it!"

Her father turned towards May with an inquiring look and a little uncertainty, but she was honestly smiling, and though a good deal surprised and a little taken aback, was rather amused at this conclusion of Lionel's passion.

"After all one needn't be so very anxious about the profound effect of one's own charms," she laughed to herself a little mockingly. "I've wasted a great deal of good care and thought about his pain, while meantime he was flirting very comfortably with Milly!"

CHAPTER XXI.

SUNSET.

"I give him to you as a good man, not as a prodigy of goodness."—MANZONI'S *Promessi Sposi*.

"I DON'T like papa's look at all, Tom," said May the next day, after an anxious watching. "He is more drowsy, and his pulse so feeble, he can hardly sit up in his chair, and he won't go to bed. I think we ought to send for Hastings. Papa has always said, 'Not yet, dear,' when I have proposed it. But I don't think it would be right to put off letting him know now," she said, with a quiver in her voice.

Railroads were open by this time, and Captain Dimsdale soon appeared, but, unfortunately, his wife arrived with him. Something had gone wrong in their uncomfortable household, and she had declared that unless Hastings took her to Fernyhurst she must go to Brighton; this his finances would not stand, so, as usual, she had her own way.

"You cannot go to him to-night, I am sorry to say, Hastings," said May sadly when they came in.

"If he is disturbed so late as this there is no chance of his sleeping."

"I should like to see him as soon as possible," observed Alicia, intending to be kind; "so many people are lost just for want of a little something right, you know."

"Of course everything has been done that is possible and best for him, my dear," said her husband hastily, annoyed by her tone.

"He does not know yet that you are here, and Dr. Baker said that the smallest excitement would put out the little flicker of life," replied May.

"I wonder whether you've had sufficient advice," went on Alicia importantly. "I don't think much of Dr. Baker myself. Papa was entirely cured by Dr. Chambers last winter with mustard plaisters, when he'd such a dreadful cold we thought he must have died. Have you tried mustard plaisters?" she insisted again and again.

"I'm afraid that my father's complaint is not in the least like Lord Cannondale's, unfortunately," said May sadly.

"And then there's that wonderful powder which cured Lady Emily Sanders' little girl. I can't think why you don't have Chambers, he'd know all about it. You should insist on having Chambers," she

called out again as May left the room to return to her charge.

The next morning she came down after a night spent by her father's bedside to give her brother the last news of the sick-room, and feeling tenderly to all the world at such a moment, she did her very best to be affectionate to Alicia.

"My father will see you as soon as you have done breakfast, Hastings." Then turning to her sister-in-law, "Would not a little fresh air do you good this beautiful day, my dear? Wouldn't you like to have a drive? Shall I order the carriage?"

"Thank you," said Alicia, "for thinking of it, but Hastings will take all that trouble off your hands now, he has already been to the stables and settled about the horses." She was too obtuse even to see that she was ungracious.

Hastings rose quickly and went out, and May followed him, for she evidently could be of little use by remaining.

"Well," said the old man, as his son sat down beside him, "the end is very near, Hastings—le roi est mort, vive le roi. I hope you'll make a good ruler, and carry out many things that I have failed in through life."

"You haven't failed, papa," cried May.



"Well, come short, if you like the word better," said her father with a smile; "we won't quarrel about the word. There is plenty to do. I meant to have added to the schoolhouse this year and drained the pond meadows, and I believe there ought to be new outbuildings for Dowling's farm; but you'll see to all that now," he said, with failing breath but cheerful interest in everything on both sides the river, which to him was so little dreadful.

"We won't talk of such things, sir. I hope you'll feel better yet," said Hastings affectionately. He really cared for his father a good deal in his somewhat selfish way.

"Yes," replied the old man smiling. "I shall be better soon, but it will be a long way off from the draining and roofing. I should have liked to see how the new Poor-law acted, and the steam-saw finished, and one or two more things besides, else I don't think I much want to stay here,—except for May, except for May," he added. "Poor May! I'm afraid she'll feel lonely without somebody to look after and plague her."

She could not stand it, and went out quietly that her father might not see her tears. As she passed along a passage she came upon Alicia, giving orders to the housekeeper. "You understand that the

children are to go into the south nurseries," she was saying, "and you will have them ready on Thursday. I think those will be best, May," she went on, turning to her sister-in-law.

"I'm afraid the noise will be too much for papa," replied she.

"It's just because I thought the children will be so good for him that I am sending for them," answered Alicia with dignity.

The woman looked wonderingly at May, but she passed on. Later, however, she went in search of her brother. He was sauntering about, not knowing very well what to do—it is a difficult situation for a man; he cannot be of much use in the sick-room, and waiting, which constitutes so large a portion of a woman's life, is real suffering to a man's active nature.

"Hastings," said she, putting her arm within his, "Alicia is sending for the children, and has ordered their rooms. I'm afraid papa would be annoyed if he heard they were come without his asking them. Those nurseries are just over his head, and he knows perfectly all that goes on in the house. I am sure you would say wait. It is for a very little while, dear," she said with quivering lips.

Hastings shook off her arm somewhat impatiently.

"I wish you women would settle these things among you," he said; but he went in and desired his wife, who was in general extremely indifferent to their company, to put off her babies.

"How excessively strange of May!" she repeated angrily; "why they shouldn't come to their own home, I can't think."

But, except when her charge was touched, May scarcely perceived anything without; the great sorrow made all lesser annoyances die before it.

In the sick-room the great fact of life—death—seemed so large that it overwhelmed all small irritations, as the rush of a river which covers all the pointed stones and small obstacles in its bed.

There she sat watching the ebb of that tide which was surely and quickly carrying that life to which she clung so tenderly away from her to the great sea.

The Squire was pleased to have Tom with him, who did his duty to his father most affectionately, but their minds did not run together.

"I think it is sometimes more reverent to say 'I don't understand,'" ruminated the old man one day. "What was that you were reading yesterday, May, about God's truth being boundless, and that both sides suppose that it is a pond, which you can walk round and say, 'I hold the truth'?"

“It was a bit of Robertson’s,” said she, looking it out. “‘What, all the truth? Yes, all; there it is, circumscribed, defined, formed, and you are an infidel if you do not think this pond of mine, that the great Mr. This or That dug, quite large enough to be the immeasurable Gospel of the Lord of the universe.’”

It was to May that her father clung for the help of soul and body during every hour of the day. He liked to have her near him; he missed her presence even when his eyes were closed; he lay generally in a silent repose, perfectly conscious, calm, and cheerful;—with the feeling of the homely old hymn, he did really “dread the grave as little as his bed.” The valley of the shadow had no terrors for him. His faith was that of the Lord’s Prayer—the fullest trust in “Our Father,” in love and truth.

He did not take to his bed, but sat up in an arm-chair, supported with pillows. And May was cheerful too; she read, she had a smile ready whenever she came near him, and the fullest intelligence concerning the out-door work. They talked together of heavenly things and of earthly ones as well, but he was very reticent even to her about his deepest feelings. “I’m very curious to see the other side, and those questions of identity are so wonderful,” he said one day. “What will recognition depend on?

Can the constantly improving being be said to be the same? Then in some people there seems to be hardly anything individual enough to know again. But I must believe that we should not have had all this love for each other put into us in vain. See how He seems to have loved his mother and his friends—that was the consecration of earthly friendships.” “The Master calleth thee,” he repeated after her in a low voice another day as she read to him;—“to be ready when He calls, to do what He asks, that must be life, in whatsoever world, for all.” At the same time his interest was strong for the progress of the copse-cutting, and how Russell’s new cottage was getting on. Death was no terror-striking demon to either of them, but the loving hand of a loving Father laid on them in mercy, dividing them not for long. At last the end came, so gently that no one could tell when the sleep sank into death.

“Non come fiamma che per forza é spenta
Ma che per se medesima si consume,
Se n’ andò in pace l’ anima contenta—
Parea posar come persona stanca,
Era quel che morir chiaman gli sciocchi.”

CHAPTER XXII.

TRACASSERIES.

“Grief,

Like joy should be, calm, equable, sedate,
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;
Strong to consume small troubles; to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.”

DE VERE.

ALL arrangements now fell on Hastings, and May was only too thankful to be able to remain quietly in her own room, and what was still her father's. The sons-in-law appeared in time, but Cecilia was abroad, and Mrs. Dibden happened to be ill, and could not come over to Fernyhurst for the funeral.

“Why doesn't May come down-stairs?” said Alicia, rather peevishly, within May's hearing. “I'm sure it would be so much better for her than to have her meals sent up in this way—it will do her good to see a few people.”

Accordingly, from that time, May appeared regularly until the day itself.

It was a hard time. She was physically a good deal worn out, and the change to her was great; all

that she loved seemed to be dropping away from her. After having been the darling of so many hearts, the one whose smile made father, brothers, and friends rejoice, she had become simply an indifferent guest in her own old home—her feelings, her tastes, her comfort, now less than nothing in the eyes of most of those around her.

She went to the funeral herself, rather to Alicia's annoyance, who did not like to go, and did not like to stay away. The tree had fallen in its ripeness; May could not lament for her father's gain, but she felt as she stood by that quiet grave in the green graveyard of the little grey old church where he was laid by her mother, as if into it had sunk the best part of her life.

"You'll come to us to-morrow, dear; I think it will be best every way," said Tom affectionately to her as they parted. "I never saw anything better than May's self-command, and her unwearied love all through these illnesses," he went on to his brother as they walked back together.

"Yes, I believe so," said Hastings kindly, though coolly. He was doing, however, the best he could think of for the comfort of his sister in every way.

"I wonder which May would like best to do," he said to his wife a little later—"whether to live on

with us or go to Tom's. She's very fond of him. You must ask her which she will prefer."

"Oh! we can't possibly have her here," answered Alicia in a determined tone; "that's quite out of the question. And I don't think she'd like it at all, except perhaps for a visit; besides, she told me she was going to live at the Rectory."

Hastings was surprised; it had never occurred to him that his sister was not to share his home if she pleased. He said nothing more, but quietly and kindly made his own invitation to May, which she as quietly and kindly refused.

There is no doubt that theoretically a man may ask whatsoever friend he pleases to his own house, but practically, in private as in public life, there is a prime minister behind the sovereign. His wife may make that house so hot, or she may administer such continued little cups of cold water, that the friend, if at all of a sensitive nature, will not feel much inclined to accept the invitation again.

The next day the different relations departed their several ways after breakfast.

"I don't think your crape is nearly deep enough, my dear May; just look at mine," said Alicia as they returned together side by side from the front-door, and she measured her own immaculate hems

against her sister-in-law's. "This is more respectful, you see."

"Papa had a great dislike to 'inky cloaks,' as he always called them," answered May, trying to smile; "so I told them to put on as little as possible. I did it to please *him*," she ended tearfully.

"My dear, you don't think that he can see you?" replied Alicia with a superior smile.

May winced. "I think perhaps I had better go up and set about my packing," said she as they reached the bottom of the stairs; "I have a good deal to do before I go up to the Rectory."

"Are you going to-day?" observed Alicia. "Oh, I remember. I'm very sorry about the carriage, I don't see how you can have it, as it will have just been to the railway, and you see our horses, my dear—perhaps to-morrow" She did not wish to be ill-natured, but the ownership of the horses was what was prominent in her mind at the moment, and she was, perhaps unconsciously, exerting herself a little to be disagreeable from a lurking fear that Hastings might still persuade his sister to live with them.

"Thank you," said May, "but they expect me to-day, and I'd much rather walk. I am going to collect a few books and things scattered about the house, which I should like to put together, and they can be

sent at any time that is convenient," and she went up to finish those last sad preparations, the parting from home for ever ; nothing could ever make it home to her again. She had just finished her packing, when coming down to fetch a missing volume from the library, she heard loud voices in the room beyond, and saw her own maid come out in some excitement. She went in immediately, anxious to keep the peace.

"Your maid has been quite uncivil, May," said Alicia in an aggrieved tone, "wanting to carry off that inkstand and those Japan vases."

"I am very sorry," replied she ; "but I had sent her for all my different little things, which I thought had better be put aside."

"But that inkstand is very pretty, and the vases ornament that end of the room. You mustn't take them away," complained Alicia peevishly.

"The inkstand was a present from papa when Cecilia married, and Charlie brought me the vases from India years and years ago," said May a little hotly. "But you're quite welcome to keep them as long as you like for the present."

"And I'm sure you can't want them now, even if they *are* yours."

"If!" said May to herself as she left the room to fetch her bonnet without another word. She was

troubled with herself at having been vexed. "How can anything signify to me at such a time?" she repeated.

As she passed behind the stables, by the quietest walk to the Rectory, she met Hastings.

"Where are you going to, May?" said he.

"Only up to Tom's," said she, smiling as she tried to conceal some inopportune tears.

"What, not to-day, my dear, I hope? Well, if you really prefer a little change, it may be best," said he, uneasily thinking of his wife; but you must always consider Fernyhurst your home, remember. I'll walk up with you," he went on kindly, taking her arm. "Do you really prefer walking?"

"Yes, very much," said she, hurriedly.

"And your bags and boxes?"

At that moment he saw a gardener with a wheelbarrow laden with luggage coming out of the house. Hastings bit his lips, he saw at once how it was. At the same time his own little boy came running out, shouting, "Aunt May's going in the wheelbarrow, Aunt May's riding up in the wheelbarrow."

"Alicia says the carriage has been out already. I shall want next to nothing for the present," said May, apologetically, when she saw her brother's annoyance.

Hastings was exceedingly angry, not only at

the fact itself, but at the want of consideration shown to a sister who had the honour of belonging to him. He hurried into the stable yard, and ordered the carriage, in a loud voice, "to take Miss Dimsdale's boxes up to the Rectory. She will walk herself with me," he added, in a tone which much delighted the household, who had been greatly shocked at the disrespect shown to their young lady. The housekeeper's room, indeed, had almost prepared for rebellion, and had even talked of not standing such ways, and resigning *en masse*; but the place was traditionally comfortable, and they had been there too many years to change voluntarily, so they all thought better of it,—things look different before and after tea.

It was not a pleasant walk to either May or Hastings. He was extremely vexed with his wife,—and with himself, for not keeping her in better order; but the indolent half of him knew that he should be worsted in the long run, and this put him still more out of temper. Indeed, it was nearly as much in vindication of his own dignity, as out of regard for May's feelings, that he came with her to the Rectory door, and delivered her scrupulously over to the Rectory keeping.

He did not return home till the latest moment

before dinner. "Alicia," he said, in a disgusted tone, "you might inaugurate your rule more wisely than this. Do you think you are likely to gain honour by sending away my sister, the daughter of one who was loved round the country, alone, with her bags in a wheelbarrow?"

"I didn't know they were going in a wheelbarrow. Why couldn't she wait till it suited me to drive up to the Rectory?"

"Drive up to the Rectory! A mile! Suited you!"

"And she's been wanting to half strip the house," she said peevishly.

"Strip the house, Alicia? You're too absurd."

"She sent her maid to carry off such pretty things out of the drawing-room."

"Well, I suppose they were hers."

"But we can't part with them, anyhow. Why should they be hers?"

"I say, Alicia, you're out of your senses. Send her everything that belongs to her; and let me hear no more of such ridiculous folly."

And he walked out of the room. But the things were not sent. Hastings inquired no more about them, and did not know which they were; and Alicia, if she had been asked, had the excuse always ready, that they would go "some day."

May was so completely overdone, mind and body, that, to her great distress, the next morning she was too ill to come out of her room at the Rectory. "A sort of low fever—overstrain of the nerves—head-ache. Perfect quiet," repeated the doctor. "She will soon get round here," he said, rather significantly.

It was nearly a week before she could appear at all.

The first day she came down-stairs was a bright, frosty March morning, and she lay sadly looking at the pleasant little garden, and thinking of all the pains her father had taken to make it and the house as perfect as he could.

"And here's the newspaper for you," said Sophia, bringing in an old *Morning Post* rather pompously. "Oh dear me, Tom, have you seen all this about Lord Ardmore?"

She had that curious pleasure in reading diligently all the scraps she could find concerning "the aristocracy," without knowing any of them, which is not uncommon, or the information would not be supplied so liberally. Such great facts as that "the Marquis and Marchioness of Blankshire have returned to their town mansion," do not appear to be particularly interesting to those who have not the honour of the acquaintance of the marquis or the

marchioness and are not in the least likely to enter their "town residence," but they seem to supply a queer sort of imaginative romantic food agreeable to the humdrum,—glances into a glorified existence of beings, supposed to live in perpetual fine clothes and jewels, in a golden whirl of croquet parties and dances, or riding on Lothair's "Anatolian chargers," and equally interesting whether considered as preternaturally wicked or preternaturally charming. Indeed, without this craving, Mr. Disraeli would hardly have ventured to give the world some seventeen volumes devoted chiefly to the study of the natural history of Dukes, their wives, their sons, their daughters, their sons-in-law, their men-servants, their maid-servants, their horses, their small-talk, their houses, their petticoats, and all that is theirs, with an occasional diversion upon the habits and customs of Marquises, and even as low down in the Peerage as Earls; though we feel this last to be a fall in dignity which we rather resent, after breathing the purer air of Dukedom. It is a kind of mild equivalent to the fairy tales of a younger age, of those kings and queens, and caliphs and princesses of Cloudland, who always walk about with their crowns upon their heads, and commit love or murder with equal serenity; though I myself plead guilty

to liking the latter best—"le roi Charmant" and the "Prince Sincer" are pleasanter company. If I am to read of fine chariots, I prefer the one belonging to Cinderella's godmother; and if of Lotharian "strings of pearls" and "jewelled crosses, diamond and emerald," I like them by the plateful, such as Aladdin used to send to the Princess Badoura. It is quite as real, and one has more for one's money. But this is a matter of taste, and I know this love of fairy tales was thought "silly" by Sophia.

"Look here, Tom," she went on, examining the paper: "'Decease of Lord Ardmore, aged twenty-nine.' Is not that the cousin of your friend, Mr. Scrope, whom you were at college with, and who used to come to Fernyhurst a long time ago?"

"By Jove!" said Tom, taking the *Morning Post* from her, "is that young fellow dead? 'Fall from his horse—dragged'—how very sad. I wonder whether he has left a son. I remember Scrope saying he had married two years ago."

"Here's another paragraph saying that 'we regret to state he has only one little daughter,'" his wife went on reading punctiliously, "though Lady Ardmore is about to be confined! Heir-presumptive the Honourable and Reverend Philip Scrope."

“To be sure; I forgot that,” cried Tom, much excited. “Walter’s father is the next heir. I’m sure I hope the poor woman will have sense enough to have another girl. There can’t be much of the property, I’m afraid, left for anybody, for I remember Scrope once saying that the entail had been broken, and the young lord was making ducks and drakes of the estate; there was a long squabble, and they went to law about it.”

May had a considerable access of fever that night, and Dr. Baker said she had been down-stairs too soon; but she knew better: she had been settling a point with herself. Walter would now probably be the heir to a position, if not to much property; she had refused him when he had nothing and was nobody; she never would degrade herself in her own eyes by doing anything to bring the matter on again, “For it would look—it would look” (and her cheeks glowed in the dark night as she lay and thought) “as if I had changed my mind because his position was changed.”

Every day she examined the newspapers. She had not long to wait; “Lady Ardmere of a still-born child” was soon announced. Tom was greatly excited, and wrote off his full tide of sympathy to his friend. The answer, as usual, was very affec-

tionate, but a good deal of business had fallen to Walter's share, in consequence of his cousin's death, which his father was unable to transact ; he intended, however, he wrote, to come down to his old haunts as soon as possible, and he ended with a very earnest message of condolence to May at Fernyhurst on her father's death, and of sorrow for the loss which he knew must be so great to her.

"He could hardly say less than that in common humanity," said she to herself. "Papa was so kind to him and so fond of him."

She did not improve, and lay on the sofa utterly powerless to do anything, scarcely even to think, but quite able to suffer. Moreover, about this time, Alicia began to come up continually to the Rectory, and insist on seeing her.

"You look so much better," she declared each time, seeing the crimson flush on May's cheeks, "that there can't be much the matter with you, my dear." She went on repeating the same to Sophia, and May began to see that the very respect for authority which had made Mrs. Tom behave well to the great house in the past time, now inclined her to transfer her allegiance to the powers that were, and do and think as Alicia directed.

"You must be sent to the seaside, Miss May, if

you don't behave better than this," said the kind old doctor one day, with her fluttering pulse between his finger and thumb.

"I'd better be out of the way if 'he' really does come," said May resolutely to herself, when the time for Walter Scrope's visit approached, and she accepted the banishment which was ordered her with a sort of fatalism. There was a small quiet fishing village in a beautiful bay not twenty miles away, where a few houses let lodgings, and to which she was accordingly sent.

"She ought to have had the barouche. Why didn't you offer it, Alicia?" said Hastings, as he saw the fly drive past the lodge, too late for his kind thought for his sister to bear any fruit.

"I didn't think she was to go so early. We ought to have offered that you should go with her," said Tom, coming at a stride across the fields too late to do more than give a distant wave of the hand to May.

"Oh, no, that wasn't necessary at all; Alicia says she's not nearly so ill as she thinks."

"My dear Sophia," he said affectionately, "how can you quote her? I declare ill-natured talk is as catching as small-pox. Considering all that May has gone through and lost lately, it isn't surprising if she is knocked up a little."

And he arranged a visit to his sister without

saying anything more to his wife. Whenever he really saw what was kind he did it, although he was a little narrow in his appreciation of the wants and wishes of others, and weighed them too absolutely by his own standards of thought and feeling.

The solitude was balm to May both in mind and body. The great solemn sea sympathises more with the sad than the quiet, cheerful inland scenery. Moreover, she had made up her own mind, and it is indecision which wears out the nerves of soul and body too.

"I daresay I've been too masterful with life," she mused to herself, as she paced up and down the smooth sand day after day; "too anxious to carry out, not the right, so much as my idea of what is right."

"It's a very different thing," she went on in her thoughts another time, as she watched the little white sails beating up against the wind, "to will to give up one's own will, and one's own comfort, and all that, for other people (after all, that's only a refined way of having one's own way), and to have sacrifices forced upon one by others. I daresay it's the discipline one wanted, but it isn't nice," she ended, with a little cry of compassion over herself, as if it were for some one else.

Luckily, before her self-questioning had time to become morbid, Tom had arrived to see her, and he had no taste whatever for digging up the roots of life to see whether they were growing. There is no doubt that much of such husbandry is hurtful, although, if there is none of it whatever, our experience is apt to bear but little fruit. His visit now, however, was like a bit of her old days, and helped to rouse her. He was exceedingly kind and affectionate in his own way, they walked and sat still, and talked of his own interests, and thoughts, and pursuits exclusively, not hers,—after the manner generally of a man, which often makes his sympathy very useful to a woman by carrying her more entirely out of herself,—and then they were silent, the ever constant sounding sea making a chorus which filled up, as it were, the spaces of silence, and harmonized their talk, like the base in a symphony.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIFE'S SCHOOLING.

"I classed appraising once
Earth's lamentable sounds, the well-a-day,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mournfuller.
But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of despair
Than these words, 'I loved once.' "

MRS. BROWNING.

WALTER SCROPE'S visit, however, had again been indefinitely put off, and she smiled again at herself for her unnecessary expenditure of heroism. At the end of three weeks she came back to life again, fresh and ready for the strife, but feeling a little as if she had buried her youth, and begun prematurely on middle age.

Fernyhurst, however, could never be more now than a temporary halting-place to her. Sophia was a particular housekeeper, and though May paid scrupulously for her board, she felt she was an interference to various little economies which Mrs. Tom hardly liked to have seen. Beside which, May knew

that Mrs. Longmore was hovering near, waiting to occupy the only good "spare room" at the Rectory; and however little desirable such society might be for Tom, she could not be the person to deprive him of it. Moreover, it was hardly possible for her to go on with her former work in the parish without interfering with somebody. She found that she was constantly getting into hot water on what seemed to be the most innocent subjects.

"May, did you desire that the girls at the school should have the geography lesson with the boys?" said Sophia one day, coming in deliberately and sitting down on the sofa opposite her with a solemn air.

"The new schoolmistress asked me what she was to do about it, and I said she had better go on in the old plan until she had asked Tom," replied she.

"Alicia thinks, and I entirely agree with her," went on the parish priestess, somewhat consequentially, "that there's no use in geography for girls, and that there's been a great deal too much taught them in the schools here; it only makes them uppish."

"Alicia knows so much herself that she thinks knowledge dangerous—poaching on her preserves, I suppose," said Tom, laughing.

"But you wouldn't shut geography altogether out of the girls' class, surely," observed May a little anxiously.

"That they should know about Palestine perhaps is all very well, but what's the use of *that*, I should like to know," said Sophia with much disgust as she pointed to a map of England which May was mounting at the moment.

It was no comfort to May that her brothers stepped in, and required that the obnoxious instruction should still be given ; it only made her sisters-in-law more determined in their own way, and more set against hers ; and after a few more ineffectual attempts to discover some inoffensive work which should clash with nobody's views, she gladly accepted a very warm invitation from Cecilia. Colonel Seymour was a kindly man, and an observant one. He had been considerably annoyed by what he had seen of Alicia's manner to May ; while Cecilia, though with something of the same kind of spirit as Hastings, had been greatly moved by his account—"No sister of hers should be treated in that careless way," she declared ; and, half from pity and half from opposition to Alicia, she showed herself really anxious to receive May.

Mrs. Dimsdale, relieved from all fear that May

would expect to live with them, began to bow a little to public opinion, which set clearly in the direction of the departed dynasty. She had been considerably bored by the perpetual inquiries after May—"her charming sister-in-law would soon return to them of course," "such a companion," &c. Aristides himself could not have been more tiresome. At last she insisted on May's coming to pay a parting visit to Fernyhurst.

To stay in the house was almost as trying a thing as she had yet had to encounter; it was bitter to her to see Alicia and her ways in the dear old haunts. She had seemed to take a pleasure in changing everything that could be changed in a small way, and the very flourishing about of the furniture had disturbed some of May's pet associations; she was ashamed of herself for feeling such little things so keenly, while she was perpetually called upon by Alicia for admiration of all that she had done.

"You see how extremely I have improved the look of the room, May, by sending away that stupid little table," said she, with her usual important tone. It was the one her mother always used, and May could not give a very cordial assent. "And then that uncomfortable chair, which I believe your father used to sit in—Hastings says so, but I don't believe

he knows—I'm sure nobody'll like it now, so I've just sent it into a bed-room."

"Yes, indeed," was all that May could manage to bring out—indeed, though she did her best during her visit to talk and be cheerful, her attention from time to time wandered far off into the past, and she sometimes forgot to answer, and sat still, pale, and absorbed. Alicia supposed herself to be trying to be kind, and was therefore more consequential and patronising than ever.

"I really trust we shall have quite a pleasant autumn this year," she went on saying on the evening before May's departure. "Mamma writes me word that she thinks we might persuade the Duchess Dowager to come to us in September. If we should happen to have room, May, perhaps we might squeeze you in, but naturally you understand we must be particular for the Duchess."

"What, you don't mean that you want to have that dreadful old woman!" muttered Hastings with something between a yawn and a groan; "why she's the greatest bore in Christendom!"

"I'm surprised, Hastings, you can talk in such a way of such a friend of *my* family, when you know..." cried his wife eagerly and angrily.

"What, are you going to bed already, May?"

interrupted Hastings. "You really prefer the early train, dear?—of course the carriage shall be ready whenever you wish." As his sister closed the door he looked after her. "I wish May were going to stay with us, I'm sure; she would interest one a little," he went on in a more moved tone than usual. He found life somewhat dull; he had no country tastes or pursuits except hunting and shooting, and one can't hunt or shoot in June. Many of the people who had been glad to see him in old days had dropped off since his marriage, and the prospect of the "Duchess Dowager" did not quite compensate to him for the loss; there had been a time when his soul longed after such society, but now it bored him, as indeed did most other things. "May's worth fifty thousand of your Duchess Dowagers," said he rather injudiciously for his object. "I can't think why you haven't managed for her to live with us; I'm sure you might have persuaded her if you'd pleased."

"I can't think what people mean by calling May clever," replied his wife a little acrimoniously, evading the question. "She doesn't seem to understand the simplest thing when I talk to her. I have often to repeat the whole over again, and then she gives a weakly, sickly smile, and says 'Indeed!' If it had

been any one else I should have said she hadn't got all her wits—quite below par.”

“I have no doubt you would, my dear,” answered her husband quietly; “but then you know you are so very clever yourself.”

Alicia had hardly yet come to understand her husband's irony, for the development of which indeed he was indebted to his wife—nature had not intended it for him originally. She was quite satisfied at all events with his acquiescence in facts; indeed, as to opinion, she was so clearly always in the right that it did not very much signify to her whether he agreed with her or not. She was like the Duchesse de Maine, whom her lady of honour reports as saying, with the utmost seriousness, of herself, “Après tout il n'y a que moi qui ait toujours raison;”—Alicia too was “always right” (in her own eyes).

“I think it's quite time to go to bed,” said Hastings, going off, heartily sick of the discussion.

He was more fastidious than really refined, however, which is quite a different thing, though one is often mistaken for the other. Still it was the vulgarity of his wife's mind even more than that of her manners which so vexed him; the unconscious caricature in her of all those tendencies to overvalue position and money, and fine people and fine houses,

which he could not help feeling in himself, and despising himself continually, chiefly through the reflection in her, for feeling. She was like the slave in the Roman pageant, always reminding him how small he was, and he could not be comfortably content, as she was, in that mean condition. His taste was good, and his affections were true, but they only served to render his life uncomfortable, to enable him to see enough of the right to make him dissatisfied with himself and his surroundings, without giving him the energy to set matters straight, or the philosophy to put up with the inevitable. He was vexed at May's departure. All he wanted, as he said to himself in an aggrieved tone that evening when he reached his own study, was "to get through the world with as little trouble as possible, and he had twice as many worries as any one else." He could neither manage his wife nor put up with her.

"I believe it's always the inferior who rules in a household," he comforted himself by declaring, as he pondered over it discontentedly, lying back in his chair with his arms crossed behind his head. And there is a good deal of truth in the notion; the superior mind, whether male or female, cares in general comparatively little about the trifles in dis-

pute ; it is satisfied to bear the inconvenience or the mistake, rather than to fill its thoughts with what is uninteresting, poor, and small. Besides which, being many-sided, it is willing to give scope to an individuality different to its own ; and so the pertinacious little mind, always on the watch, taking advantage of every small victory, every increase of territory by lapse, gradually encroaches over the whole field, and Gulliver finds himself bound down by infinitesimal cords, from the hair of his head to the soles of his feet. True, he might break through them if he pleased, but with many men and women of power this is far too much trouble ; it is not worth while,—and so they think out their thoughts alone, in that solitude where a stranger intermeddleth not. Even in instances of far stronger characters than that of poor Hastings, you wonder at the strange sight of a good, and clever, and affectionate man going down to his grave without having influenced his wife's opinions or habits by a hair's-breadth. After all, who can explain that subtle thing called influence ?

The moonlight was pouring through the open window when May reached her room, and as she leant out of it sweet scents came up from jessamine and sweetbriar, and the old-fashioned roses tangled

against the house, which seemed as if made sweeter by the night air. Still, pure, and cold, the light lay on the shaven velvet turf, the beds of flowers, the well-known outline of the trees, but all colour was gone out of them. She could hear Hastings stirring in the room below, which had been her father's; all was so much the same and yet so utterly different; a bat flitted noiselessly by, like the ghost of a bird; and the strange look which familiar objects bear in the quiet night, as if the life had died out of them, made her feel like a ghost herself wandering in her old world,—its outlines were all still the same, but the colour had died out of them for her. She had reached resignation, but it was not yet peace, as she sat on, nearly as still and cold as the moonlit scene itself, till long after midnight, trying as it were to take a farewell look at everything which was before her eyes, but in reality with a tumult of thoughts and recollections rushing through her brain, which whirled her along in strange contrast to the outer world before her. When she returned to herself the great stable clock was striking. Its note was repeated once more by the old clock on the stairs. "I know it—I know it only too well already. You need not tell me again," she felt inclined to say

sadly, as she roused herself. The little cheerful breeze which precedes the dawn was rising: her "last day" at Fernyhurst was indeed over.

It was a brilliant summer's morning as she drove away to the railway station. Fernyhurst was in the full glory of the flush of June, the great woods in the first richness of their foliage, before the heavy greens of later months had begun, a luxuriant world of flowers and leaves seemed bursting into life in every direction, the sun shone through the bright beech-leaves with an almost golden glory, showers of pink roses hung over the holly bushes, foxgloves peeped out of the open glades of the wood. She had a recollection hung round almost every tree and bush, every peep of blue distance and sunny slope, upon each evidence of thought and taste so lavishly bestowed upon the inanimate things, far longer lived than the devisers who had fashioned them with such care; and she looked her last out of each side of the carriage alternately, with a bitter, silent renunciation of all that had made life dear to her, which was almost stern in its completeness. That chapter in her history was indeed ended.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOVING ON.

“For work is the great cure of all the maladies and miseries that beset mankind, honest work which you intend getting done.”

CARLYLE.

IT was the beginning of June, and London was a discordant place to poor May, full of her past memories, but she was glad to get there; she longed to take root again somewhere, to begin some settled work once more. Clearly, thinking and reading did not answer; there is a time for everything, and there are some stings which only forgetting oneself can cure. But used as she was to the country poor, such work in London was to her a dismal thing. May knew every soul, good and bad, old and young, at Fernyhurst. When they were sick or in want, it was with no haphazard distribution that she carried them her relief, but with as much knowledge as is generally given us to gain of our fellow-creatures in any rank of life. There she was in the habit of paying visits of what may be called real affection, to friends of long standing, who were truly glad to see her for her

own sake ; who cared almost as much for the welfare of Master Tom and the whereabouts of Master Charlie as about their own belongings ; they were part of the clan, as it were. Her intercourse was not based upon the "half-a-crown and a ton of coals" principle, which disorderly misery is likely to extract out of a district visitor. The visit in general was pleasant to both, and if in the course of conversation she found that her friend had a cough or a bad appetite, the something which she sent no more degraded the recipient than the flowers and grapes which she took perhaps to the neighbour of another rank the week after. There are bad enough, as well as good, among the country poor, Heaven knows ; still, there she was not poking in uncertain ash-heaps and pools of mud, but with her eyes open, doing her best with vice, or trying to help the struggling. But in that great gulf of London misery, where the best help which can be given seems a mere drop in the ocean, she felt her task rather a hopeless one. There was a wretched alley allotted to her, but there was no particular reason why it should come to her share ; there was no tie between them ; she knew there were thousands behind who had as great a claim. She had nothing to do with the "intelligent artisans," indeed the rich have generally little inter-

course in London, except with the begging portion of the working class, on the footing, too often, for one side, of getting as much as they can, and on the other of liberating their consciences : while if by chance she contrived to establish a really friendly footing, the extraordinary nomadic habits of the London poor caused her to lose sight of them if she left town for a few months. It seems generally almost impossible for a family to continue a year in the same lodging—a strange contrast to the tenacity with which she knew the peasants cling to the old “home,” however poor. With extraordinary recklessness, too, they had often flown without leaving the smallest clue by which to trace them, although they knew they could expect help and sympathy from her, which they valued exceedingly. They have less foresight, as some one has remarked, than ants and bees ; while the much maligned country poor, at a distance from shops and markets, are far more used to look ahead.

She set to work, however, as best she could. She was determined to make London her home, and pay the rent of duty there. She saw nothing of Walter Scrope, and heard but little more. There is hardly any place, indeed, where a meeting is not more likely to take place than in that gigantic portentous “concourse of atoms” called London. Men and women

may live for years within half a mile (of streets) of each other, and, unless they happen to belong to the same set, never catch so much as a distant glimpse each of each. For some time May went on expecting the accident of coming across him, fancying she saw him in one crowd after another, but gradually the hope died away.

His father's peerage had so little to support it that he was going on with his law as steadily, but not much more successfully than before. He was always busy, and had little to do with the society in which the Seymours lived, who rarely met him. One morning at breakfast, however, the Colonel began upon him.

"I am afraid young Scrope is becoming extremely odd. I think you used to have him at Fernyhurst in old days, May," he said, turning to his sister-in-law. May assented quietly. "I heard yesterday that he was teaching mathematics to a class at the Working Men's something or other. Now, that you should assist the common people in hospitals and clothing clubs is quite right" (he was a governor himself), "but really mathematics is a little too absurd."

May humbly suggested that it might be better than the public-house.

“My dear May, you really don’t understand the question—such teaching leads to Bristol riots, and corn-law leagues, and all sorts of atrocities. I am sure the Duke would never”

We have nearly forgotten the sort of absolute despotism exercised over English society of a certain class by Wellington about twenty years ago; he was a mighty man of war, and great in his own way, but on subjects in which he had had even less opportunity of judging than other men, his opinion was considered quite as decisive. His administrations had failed,* his prognostics had proved utterly false, he had had to carry the measures of his opponents against his own repeated protests, but still his admirers clung to their faith. What “the Duke said” (there was but one Duke in England) was absolutely infallible, and any statement which required endorsement, whether social, political, or religious, was supposed to gain weight by using his omniscient name. “Field Marshal the Duke’s” pocket-handkerchiefs were stolen as relics by enthusiastic ladies, who asked his opinion on the merits of a new preacher and how their little girls should be educated. “Field Marshal the Duke” was consulted

* Mr. Disraeli’s curious estimate of his political capacity in “Sybil” is worth looking at—“Save me from my friends.”

on matters of taste by Government, whether his statue should be hoisted up on the arch before his door; and next—when the whole world was horrified at its effect—whether his Grace considered that he had not better come down again. Wherefore, when this dreaded name appeared on the field, May prudently turned the conversation, and Walter's crimes were forgotten in the story of the battle of Salamanca, where the Colonel had been as a boy, and the description of which had ever (to himself if not to his hearers) the freshest interest and delight.

Once only did she and Walter happen to meet. She had been called in by her sister to help her with some visitors, when "Mr. Scrope" was announced. He came warmly up to her, and she saw that he was struck by her pale, sad looks, for his expression changed to one of deep compassion; but she had told herself beforehand how she meant to behave, and her manner was frank and calm and simple with him, as of old. She thought that he looked disappointed, but did not feel sure. He made his inquiries after Tom, whom he had been down to visit, said a word of affectionate remembrance of her father, and went away; and May, one half of herself having, as it were, looked on from without at the other half acting a part without flinching, compli-

mented herself on her cool self-possession, and then rushed up-stairs, fastened her door, and lay, tearless, pale, and wretched, on her bed.

“Why did I do it? I know I gave him pain, and when he came up so friendlily; it was nothing but pride. Why could I not be friendly with him?” she repeated to herself. And then her pride took fire again. “He shall not say I sought him now when I am sad and dull, and have nothing to give. He meant only to be friendly and kind, and nothing more,” and she hid her head on the pillow with sheer misery.

“We’ve had Walter Scrope here to-day, Egerton,” said Cecilia to her husband that evening.

“I always hope that we shall hear he’s going to be married; that’s the best thing *he* can do. He could easily find somebody, and a nice somebody too, with plenty of money, to take him; and it’s his duty to try and restore that old peerage,” answered he.

“I can’t bear that sort of bargaining—so much title for so much money,” put in May, a little moved.

“My dear May, it isn’t that,” observed her brother-in-law gently. “You don’t consider; a poor peerage is a very trying thing; there are all kinds of duties required of a man by his position;

real duties which you would be the first to acknowledge to be such, which can't rightly be accomplished without money, and which it is extremely painful for a man to refuse. And you don't mean to say that he couldn't find a charming girl *with* money. It isn't only the poor ones who are nice. He must look out for the combination of the two in his circumstances; it restricts his choice a little, that's all."

May was silent. "That's the advice which all his best friends are giving him," she thought to herself, "and quite rightly too," she added with a sigh.

Once again she saw him in the distance. It was at some great public celebration, and she felt sure that he had seen her too, and had slipped out of the way. She did not go into society, and a sort of fervent desire came over her to meet him again, to be sure that he had ceased to care for her, to be in his company, to speak to him, and make certain at least of what she herself was feeling.

And August came. The London air felt as if it had been breathed over and over again, till all the freshness was taken out of it, and the baked pavement and walls made the streets feel like ovens. The green grass had become brown, and the rosy faces looked fagged and weary, and the whole of London was going out of town (with the exception

of two million of people, that is, as much as the whole population of Scotland), and Colonel and Mrs. Seymour, of course, were preparing to go also. He had arranged for some grouse shooting with his friends in Scotland, and with his wife and sister-in-law wandered on visiting from one house to another, with an occasional halt at some pretty inn, for the rest of the autumn.

May had hardly travelled anywhere in her life; and a tour in Scotland was so great a pleasure that at first she began to believe her extreme depression to have been a good deal owing to want of fresh air. But purple mountains and blue sea do not long keep off thinking. Mountain travel was not at all in Cecilia's way. She "did not want to climb up that steep place to see the view," she "should tear her gown walking through that odious heather." She did "not like to go on the lake, it was so disagreeable to have the wind blowing all one's hair about so." She always looked as if she came out of a bandbox, and sacrifices must be made—one cannot have everything, and the least important must of course go to the wall. Still this was not exactly the companion for enthusiastic delight in beautiful rivers and rough mountain walks and rides.

Colonel Seymour's way of viewing scenery was

different, but hardly more congenial—it was simply conscientious. They were to go to that waterfall because General Bentinck had said it was the finest in Scotland; and they took such another route because Lady Ben Lomond had told them that there was nothing like Loch Awe, and the view of Ben Cruachan, and when they met her &c., &c. Then, having fully inspected the sight, whatever it might be, he put down his guide book or his opera glasses, his conscience at rest, and there was nothing more to be said about the matter.

It is difficult to enjoy much under such solitary circumstances. Moreover, it is a tremendous wrench in life for a woman, whose whole time has been occupied for others—arranging for them, thinking for them, sacrificing herself in their service, with all the weight of responsibility of a large household, and in some respects the welfare of a parish greatly devolving upon her, who has been accustomed to receive the consideration and affection that result from her position, when she suddenly loses the whole. Now May had to seek her own duty, the hardest of all. She had been able to secure an hour to herself hitherto with difficulty, now it signified to no one how many hours she took, what she did, or what she thought; the ground had,

as it were, been cut away under her feet, and she had to work out for herself a new place to stand on. The burden of choice in occupation falls so rarely on a woman in the course of her life, which is generally entirely cut out for her, that it is hardly to be wondered at if the unused faculty is weak and uncertain when the necessity is thrust upon her, and that she often chooses wrong.

She would willingly have devoted herself to Cecilia, but that lady, though she liked every sort of attention—and indeed esteemed it as her right—considered affection as utterly superfluous; she did not know what to do with it, and it was returned on the giver's hands as not wanted.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN HARNESS.

"Oh, lady, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live."

"All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
With its peculiar tint of yellow green;
And still I gaze, but with how blank an eye,
I see them all so excellently fair;
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are."

COLERIDGE.

"SUAVE mari magno," . . . said the Colonel (Latin quotations were more common twenty or thirty years ago in ordinary conversation), as he settled himself in the railway carriage of the express for London, their journey nearly over, and looked round, rubbing his hands, "which means how pleasant it is to see the men and women rushing up and down the station as the train is starting, while you are comfortably established in your chosen place with your rug, your bag, and cutting open the leaves of the morning paper."

He was not sorry to be going back to his usual habits

of easy-going London life, and his spirits rose every step as they whirled along nearer and nearer, while poor May felt as if she were returning to a cage.

It is always a striking thing to enter London towards night after a few months' absence—the size, the persistence of the rush of that great river of life rolling past—the stream which has flowed on so long before any of us were in being, which will flow just as busily when every one of the individuals who compose it are gone to work elsewhere, very far away—the glare, the noise, the intense life lived there, and the equally intense feeling of one's own insignificance as one drives in from the railway station into that full tide of human joys and woes. Elsewhere one's own individuality has at least some weight, is of some little importance; one's comings and goings make an appreciable difference, to a certain set at least. But here no drop of rain which falls into the sea could be absorbed more unconsciously, or be more convinced of its small value to the whole, than May as she once more took up the, to her, rather weary round of London life with a sigh.

Colonel Seymour was an agreeable, pleasant man, very fond of his club and of society, with gentlemanly manners and a quiet good-natured selfishness which made him like to see other people enjoy them-

selves, if it was according to his own views of what was pleasant, and did not interfere with his notions of what was proper and becoming—a thorough man of the world, who hated enthusiasms and philanthropies and aspirations, and wondered at everybody for not being perfectly satisfied with such a life as pleased him so completely. He did not at all approve of his sister-in law's going among filthy alleys and courts. "She's a great deal too good-looking," he said to his wife, who was inclined to let May occupy herself as she pleased, as long as she was not troubled in the matter.

"You really ought to speak to her, Cecilia,—she comes in looking so dead tired and so white; and Lady Anne Saville would never have allowed her daughter to do such a thing, I'm sure, and Lady Newtown would not have listened to it for a moment. She's not fit for that sort of thing at all."

And to a certain extent it was true. May was not cut out for a sister of charity—she required a personal interest; she could have sat up every night for a month with an individual, but sick humanity did not as yet fill the vacant place in her heart.

The "loneliness of life" fell heavily upon her; the want of sympathy in the thoughts and the objects she cared for was like a dead weight upon her, as she went round the narrow circle to which her

brother-in-law's care and kindness confined her, and did as well as she could within its limits. She found existence, however, rather hard. She had all her life lived with original minds, with people who thought, and put their thoughts into words and works, or refreshed themselves with clever nonsense; and the bore to her of these well-educated, well-born, well-bred people of the world, to whom dining, and dressing, and driving, and visiting were the great aims of life, with which not to be satisfied was almost a crime, became oppressive to her to that degree that she would have welcomed the conversation of a well-behaved ploughman as a relief. It was like living in a hothouse, and she longed for fresh air. She grew more silent and absent in spite of all her endeavours. Like many other impressionable clever people, she could not make talk, like so many yards of tatting, whenever she wished. With kindred responsive minds her thoughts seemed to flash in return. She was surprised sometimes herself at the sparks hit out of her by the flint and steel of real congenial conversation; but with those who did not understand her, it was like the dull cold piece of metal before the electric coil is complete, and she sometimes seemed to herself as dull as Alicia considered her. It was the difference between

a bird carolling in the open wood and the same bird sitting caged and silent.

“Sense to which there’s no replying,
Truths which there is no denying,”

oppressed her like a nightmare, and she felt keenly that

“Nonsense would” indeed be “exquisite.”

But wit and humour were generally tabooed in the heavy atmosphere of propriety to which she was now condemned. “*Les sots ne savent pas rire*,” it is said, but it is by no means only “*les sots* ;” there is a ponderous respectability and a fine flower of fashion in which it is sometimes almost as rare.

She saw nothing of Walter Scrope, and heard only that he had gone to the East—an old fancy of his, she remembered—and after his return that his mother had been ill, and that he had been called down to the north.

The world was beginning to return to London, and the Seymours prepared, as usual, to receive and to go out, and expected May to do the same. She was glad now to join them. She had a longing wish to see Walter once more, “just to be friendly with him” again. “Why should we not be friendly now that he has forgotten anything further?” she repeated to herself. “Of course there could not now be anything else between us—a man who has been twice

refused." And as each day passed and they never met, the deferred hope of this small instalment of blessing made her heart sick with the intense desire after old times as represented by him—after the sympathy which she now knew that in many things she had never had so truly with any one (though she had not cared for the man) except her father. But it was evidently not to be, and it was her own doing, and she set to work with an earnest desire to do her duty and live on in that shadowed valley through which her pathway now lay. And among those nicely dressed girls, with flowers in their hair and fans in their hands, there are many who are fighting as hard battles, going through as painful struggles, as any which their fathers and brothers are waging in the world outside. With powers and abilities for which there is no legitimate outlet, affections for which they have no sufficient object, quiet sorrows which no human being ever guesses, longings which would only be laughed at if known, how willingly would they exchange this life of luxurious repression for the really active work of their men relations—for work, however hard and trying. Even to see a definite end for what they endure would be something; but to walk on in the darkness is what is demanded of them, and they do

it by hundreds and thousands without a murmur, cutting themselves down as well as they can, with unconscious heroism, to the melancholy standard required of them.

The dull monotony of those wintry days seemed to eat into her, and the sort of discussion which took place over all her plans was to her exceedingly trying; she missed the free life of her old home beyond measure.

"So you have been to that committee at Lady Mary's, to-day?" said Colonel Seymour kindly, one evening; "I hope it was pleasant, my dear May."

May smiled. "We spent nearly an hour in deciding whether a little ship should or should not be engraved at the head of our circulars. Twelve ladies debated it warmly. I think eleven would have done it quite as well—it might have been settled without my valuable assistance. And then any business which there was to be done was just arranged at the end of all things by the only two people in the room who really knew anything about it: what use were the rest of us? I don't think I shall go again."

"My dear May," remonstrated the Colonel earnestly, "pray do not give it up; Lady Mary will be a very pleasant person for you to know, and Mrs. Tyndale

gives capital dinners—very good society indeed—it would be the greatest pity for you to neglect such a pleasant opening, wouldn't it, Cecilia?" he ended, turning to his wife, who had just come in.

"A great pity," replied she absently. "You'll remember, Egerton, that we dine at seven to-day at General Bligh's, and go to the Russells afterwards.

"But you hope she won't give up the committee?" insisted her husband.

"Oh, yes, certainly," said she carelessly.

But May did not care to play at work in this manner—to turn philanthropy to account in the line of fine acquaintance. The gossip of good society did not seem to her much better than the gossip below it. She did not care to know whether Miss Brown was going to be married to Mr. Jones, and even when sublimated into the chances of the Duke of Bareacres marrying Lady Julia with nothing, or Miss Money with £150,000, it did not seem to her to make it much more interesting.

Colonel Seymour hated anything "blue," and authors, artists, and scientific men were all slightly beyond the pale. You might speak to some of the chief celebrities if you met them at Devonshire or Lansdowne House, but, on the whole, "my dear, one does not have that sort of people to dinner," was the

meaning of his reply when May once asked him to invite some delinquent guilty of spending his life in this obnoxious manner. There is nothing better of its kind, or more agreeable, than the really first-rate society of London—the cream of the cream of everything, political, artistic, scientific, philanthropic, and including, of course, the best of the aristocracy in birth; at whose houses, as neutral ground, “the best,” including the best cookery and the most beautiful art, pictures, music, and company, is often found. But what is called the “best society” in the sense merely of aristocratic life is as dull as cliques must always be. Small talk is small, whether it relates to the personal affairs of the greengrocer and the cheesemonger, or of marquises and viscounts.

Colonel Seymour was almost distressed one night when, at one of the few houses they frequented, where the guests were not confined to their own social set, he saw May, who was sitting by a young neighbour of the most unexceptionable position, an eldest son, a sucking M.P., positively turn away to an old professor on the other side, in an exceedingly ill-made coat, to whom she not only talked during the whole of dinner and after, but her colour came back, her whole manner changed, and her face was glowing with interest in what he was telling her.

"She'll never marry, my dear Cecilia, if she goes on in that way," said the kindly Colonel, with a groan, that evening when he came up to bed; "and she looked so handsome, too, to-night," he added, unconscious that it was the interest she had felt which gave her the lacking fire; "young Russell admired her exceedingly, I saw, but she never gave him a chance!"

"It was that tiresome Oxford man's fault, Professor of History, or something stupid, for I asked who he was," answered Cecilia, yawning; "I can't imagine what she found in him."

Her husband laughed. "To be sure there never were two sisters so unlike," said he; and though he was finding such fault with May, he was not quite sure at the moment that he preferred the type which he himself possessed. He remembered luckily in time, however, that it certainly was a more convenient and manageable one, and that the next morning he should probably be fretting over May's desire to go to some unpleasant school or hospital, or to see her throwing her interests into an entirely wrong direction. He cared much more affectionately, indeed, about her future than Cecilia, who seldom troubled her soul much for anything which did not concern her own comfort or pleasure. And it was

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selves, if it was according to his own views of what was pleasant, and did not interfere with his notions of what was proper and becoming—a thorough man of the world, who hated enthusiasms and philanthropies and aspirations, and wondered at everybody for not being perfectly satisfied with such a life as pleased him so completely. He did not at all approve of his sister-in law's going among filthy alleys and courts. "She's a great deal too good-looking," he said to his wife, who was inclined to let May occupy herself as she pleased, as long as she was not troubled in the matter.

"You really ought to speak to her, Cecilia,—she comes in looking so dead tired and so white; and Lady Anne Saville would never have allowed her daughter to do such a thing, I'm sure, and Lady Newtown would not have listened to it for a moment. She's not fit for that sort of thing at all."

And to a certain extent it was true. May was not cut out for a sister of charity—she required a personal interest; she could have sat up every night for a month with an individual, but sick humanity did not as yet fill the vacant place in her heart.

The "loneliness of life" fell heavily upon her; the want of sympathy in the thoughts and the objects she cared for was like a dead weight upon her, as she went round the narrow circle to which her

and here was May nearly six-and-
 -ting done! He began to consider
 - was greatly to blame for not having
 - ing suitable for her. It would be a
 - lose her, but the code of social
 - his eyes, something of the sacred-
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the other. May suffered a good deal from his being accustomed to the perfect rest, where, as the chief lady of the household, she was almost considered right hand at all events, nobody had a word to say to her but her father, who was master of her doings; and now, Colonel May was happy at every turn—he remonstrated without a servant, and even ten years ago cabs were not quite so common in London life, and poor May's tether was as time went on, and she was less and less as the season advanced. "You are a good lady," said she, driven to her knees by his kindly interference to

and a very pretty one,
 past his manners, for

very disinterested of him, for he was very fond of his sister-in-law, and, except for their occasional disagreements about matters of etiquette, which he generally, too, contrived to filter through his wife, they were excellent friends. She was always ready for breakfast and dinner—to do anything which he wished, always obliging, always attentive to what he said. He even rather liked instructing her about politics, although, in general, he considered that women had nothing to do with such subjects. Cecilia was so perfectly indifferent about them, that it was hardly worth while for him to take the trouble of explaining to her the turpitude of the Whigs on the corn-law question, or on the subject of Reform; but he had stretched a point, though against his convictions, and full as it were of parentheses, and allowed that a young lady (or, at least, this young lady) might care for such questions (or rather for his interest in such questions) without losing caste. He had known almost everybody worth knowing in a certain class, had been “everywhere,” and had a great deal of gentlemanly political history at his fingers’ ends which interested her exceedingly, while she kept her own opinions safely to herself. Altogether, she would be a sad loss to his household; but he had been taught to believe that it was the chief business of

woman to marry, and here was May nearly six-and-twenty, and nothing done! He began to consider that he himself was greatly to blame for not having arranged something suitable for her. It would be a great sacrifice to lose her, but the code of social proprieties had, in his eyes, something of the sacredness of moral laws, and it was as painful for him to see one infringed as the other.

Meantime, poor May suffered a good deal from his kindness; she had been accustomed to the perfect freedom of Fernyhurst, where, as the chief lady of the place, a thing was almost considered right because she did it; and, at all events, nobody had a right to find fault with her but her father, who was always pleased with her doings; and now, Colonel Seymour was made unhappy at every turn—he remonstrated if she went out without a servant, and even resented a cab. Twenty years ago cabs were not quite adopted into “genteel” life, and poor May’s tether grew smaller and shorter as time went on, and she was allowed to do even less as the season advanced.

“But I’m not a young lady,” said she, driven to bay one day, goaded by his kindly interference to remonstrate.

“Yes you are, my dear, and a very pretty one, too,” answered he, exasperated past his manners, for

he was too truly a gentleman to pay direct compliments in general.

He was an enigma to her, and she to him. As they sat at breakfast opposite each other, she used to consider him with wonder—his fine head, large, well formed, its grey hair—he was much older than his wife—giving weight and dignity to his appearance,—very good-looking, and perfectly unaffected and gentlemanlike; there was material and experience of all kinds apparently in him; how could such a man be content to dwell in decencies for ever? how could he be quite satisfied, as he seemed, to go from the military gossip of one club to the political gossip of another, with the little bits of work which he made for himself—from Lord John's dinner to Lady Julia's *soirée*? “Too much caution, and too much sense,” said she to herself, as she handed him his tea.

“If she hadn't so much enthusiasm, and more worldly wisdom, she'd be perfect,” said he to himself as he gave her the bits of news in the paper.

“Mr. Rainsforth is dead; I'm afraid all those children of his are very poorly left. You know he gave up a pension of £7,000 or £8,000 a year.

“What a fine fellow!” said May enthusiastically.

“‘What a fine fool!’ I'm afraid the world would say,” replied her brother-in-law, smiling.

“But it was a magnificent thing to do. It doesn’t signify what the world might say, surely; he must have been a noble man,” said she earnestly, her colour rising as she spoke. “What was the pension for?”

“It was some sinecure which he inherited from his father. There was not the smallest reason for his resigning it, and very hard on his large family to give away their patrimony. The country was quite rich enough to pay it.”

She gave it up. They were not talking the same language; words and deeds had different meanings for them. It seemed sometimes as hopeless for them to understand each other on such matters, fond as they were of one another’s society, as if one was talking Greek and the other German.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CAGED BIRD.

“Strangers yet—
After strife for common ends,
After title of ‘old friends,’
After passions fierce and tender,
After cheerful self-surrender;
Hearts may beat and eyes be met,
And the souls be strangers yet.”

LORD HOUGHTON.

“WHAT are you going to do to-day, Cecilia?” said May one morning. “I’ve a letter from Amy, saying that Lionel and Milly were to sail from Halifax by this packet. He writes word that he must be for a few days in town on business at the Horse Guards. Milly is not very well; I think we ought to go and look after her a little. I see the Cunard boat is in, and Amy tells me the name of the hotel where they were to go.”

“I’ll come, certainly,” said Cecilia, laughing. “Milly must be quite original and well worth seeing in the capacity of a matron!”

They found the Wilmots in a dark, untidy room

in a noisy street, Milly looking sick and worn, with the sort of half pathetic, childish, forlorn expression in her beautiful eyes which one sees in dogs and children, and with a crying baby in her lap. The dancing spirits of old times seemed tamed out of her; but she was as captivating and as graceful as ever when she greeted them with her little rosebud of a mouth. She seemed, however, to stand in some awe of her tall soldier husband, though his manner to her was as gentle as if she had been a child.

Cecilia took immediate possession of him as a matter of right; and Milly threw herself at once on May with a whole Iliad of woes.

“Oh, May, I’m so ill! and I want such a quantity of things in London. I haven’t any clothes fit to be seen. I’m such a figure,” she said half-crying, “and we’d such a bad passage, and baby was so cross.”

“What a nice little fellow!” replied May affectionately, taking the child in her arms, which stopped crying almost immediately.

“Its nurse said she must go out and get all sorts of things, and so she’s left it to me,” said the young mother, playing with the baby over May’s shoulder, but apparently greatly preferring to see it in any one else’s hands than her own.

“Only Milly isn’t quite certain which end of ‘it’

ought to be held uppermost," observed Cecilia, turning in the middle of her talk with Lionel to laugh at Milly's certainly unskilful attempts in the nursing line.

Lionel looked rather grave. He evidently disliked his wife to be considered not up to her motherly duties. He was just preparing to go out. "I'm sorry to say that I have an appointment" he began, turning to Cecilia apologetically.

"What! you're not going already? Won't you come back, dear, and take me out? I've got such a heap of places to go to and people to see," said his little wife dolefully, with the tears in her eyes.

"My love," remonstrated her husband, "I've got business all day—very important business at the Horse Guards. I'm very sorry; but how can I possibly come?"

"Shan't I stay and help you, Milly?" interposed May, as Cecilia rose to move off, saying consolingly:—

"You must come to luncheon with us, dear. I'm quite sorry we dine out; but you'll be sure and keep to-morrow free. Colonel Seymour is so anxious to talk over army matters with Lionel—questions of the greatest depth and dryness," she laughed, turning to him as she took his arm to go down-stairs.

May's company was accepted with rapture by his

wife. "And you'll do much better than Lionel, because you won't mind the shops," said Milly, joyfully, "and he can't bear them."

"I should think not," answered May with wonder. "You don't mean that you ask him to go shopping?"

The rest of the day was spent in following her little cousin about from gown-maker to bonnet vendor—for coverings of all sorts, from the feet to the head. They had luncheon at the Seymours, and the Colonel's evident admiration of her, and May's affectionate petting, had its due effect upon the child-wife, while, like a little bird whose feathers have been ruffled by the cold, she smoothed and preened her plumage. She had so far recovered her former spirits that when they returned to the hotel in the evening, and found Lionel sitting ready-dressed for dinner and writing at a table, she rushed up to him with all her old manner, calling upon him for admiration "of such a love of a little bonnet!" Lionel looked occupied and tired; he gravely tried his best to do justice to the bonnet, and began again busily turning over his papers.

"What *have* you been doing all day, dear?" said she, hovering gaily round him.

"Oh, regimental business," he answered slightly.

"But what, dear?"

"I am afraid it would be as enigmatical to you as bonnets are to me," he went on with a smile. "I wonder what can have become of the foul copies of two sheets of my report? It was all right this morning before I went out. Milly, you haven't seen them? Where can they have got to? They were the very point of the whole matter, and I can't go without them."

"I don't know in the least," replied she, beginning to hunt in the most impossible places.

"What's this?" muttered he at last, picking up a crushed, torn lump of paper. He unfolded it: it was part of the missing sheets.

"Oh, I remember now. I found them on the ground, and they were all so blotted and scratched, I didn't think they signified, and I made them into a ball to play with baby when he cried so this morning," said Milly, looking as if she would cry too if she dared. "I'm so sorry."

He said nothing, pieced the sheets together as well as he could, and prepared to go out.

"Shall we copy them, Lionel?" said May in a low voice; "we can do it very soon between us. Send back your servant for them if you can't wait; they shall be ready almost directly."

"Thank you," he answered shortly. "Milly, the

general has asked me to dine with him and talk this report over. I hope May will be able to stay with you, for I really was obliged to accept. You mustn't sit up for me, dear, I may be very late, and it would only tire you to wait," and with a grave kiss he went off, and the two were left alone.

"You see, May," said Milly, throwing herself into an armchair and looking wretched, "he treats me like a baby. He isn't even angry with me. He doesn't care for my caring about his things."

"Come and write, dear," said May, going on with the sheet of the report.

"What's the use? Lionel says I write so badly he can't read it when it's done," she said despondently.

"But then, Milly, you might learn, surely, to write better. Surely you want to try and help him."

"Yes, I daresay I ought; but don't you see, May, everybody used always to think everything I did and said charming, and everybody petted me and said it was so nice; and now it seems so hard Lionel isn't pleased with things very often. At Quebec it was so dull after I married," she said piteously; "he didn't like me to flirt with the officers."

"I should think not," answered May with a smile,

but writing on busily all the time. "A matron with a child!"

"Don't laugh, May," cried the matron energetically. "How could I change all at once? I was too young, you know, to marry. I wish he'd waited a little. I should like to have been a girl a few more years."

"To flirt?" asked May, laughing.

"Well, you know it *is* dull to have to be so well-behaved, and Lionel talking about married women's manners, and all that nonsense. After all, I'm only eighteen and a-half; and besides, he knows I love him better than anything else in the world; and think him so great, and good, and clever, so why need he care? Papa said I was a great deal too young, but, you see, Lionel was so much thought of out there, and such a good officer and all that, and he was much the best-looking man, too, of any of them."

"That's an excellent reason certainly," laughed May.


"He used to come to the Admiralty House a great deal—we were next door to cousins, you know, and papa couldn't make enough of him, and mamma liked him so, and then . . . I never told you, May, how it all was," she said suddenly.

"No, dear; perhaps you'd better not; it was between you and Lionel, and he mightn't like it," answered May loyally, for it was a deeper feeling than mere curiosity which made her long to hear.

"Oh no, Lionel can't mind, not to you, you are quite old and wise, and I like to tell you, I've got nobody to talk to here.—You see he never would flirt with me, or anything, and I could manage most of the other officers as I pleased, and so, you know, I wanted and cared all the more."

"Little Queen Coquette, as the boys used to call you of old," laughed May a little sadly.

"And I couldn't make him care one bit whatever I did," said Milly, musing; "and at last it vexed me so that I went on thinking no end about him, more than was comfortable, you know. And one day he came into mamma's own sitting-room, but she was out and I was by myself, for a wonder. I'd been practising that 'Farfaletta' that you used to like, you know, in order to sing that evening; such a beautiful quiet evening, and the light on the water, and I was looking out at it a little bit sad, you know, for he had told us he was going back to Quebec. I'd got on my pale pink little gown with the puffs (I like to wear it now), and so when he came in he said it was to wish good-bye, for he mightn't see us



again, for after that he should go to England—just quite as if it were nothing! And I asked, what, wasn't he coming back at all? and then I burst out crying, and said I wished he had never come near us. I felt like the little moth which had just got too near the candle, and as if I'd burnt my wings too. And he was very much surprised, and said he'd never thought I should have cared about it in that way, and so you know and then you understand," and the young face looked up blushing and smiling, half tenderly, half consciously. "And, do you know, I was so frightened at what I'd done that I ran away and hid myself when mamma came in. I thought, for one thing, he was so much too good for me, and then papa didn't like at all parting with me—nor mamma neither. Somehow he fancied I was a child still, I believe, and he was quite surprised, but still they thought so much of Lionel that they said they couldn't refuse anything he asked, and so it was done, and now you see what's come of it."

"Dear child," said May sadly, after a little pause, "you gave up the pleasant old careless days to marry a very fine fellow, a man whom you love dearly, too, with first-rate objects in life,—can't you try and care for them?"

"They're such stupid things; why won't he care a little too for what I like?" answered Milly. "Didn't you see how he put me away, like a child, just now?"

"But, Milly, a man who cares much for *chiffons* isn't worth loving; he likes the result, he likes to see you look pretty."

"I don't believe he cares a bit," pouted Milly.

"Then why did he marry you, dear?" was on May's lips, but she suppressed it. "Don't you think you could enter into his interests?" and as she saw the dislike of interference lighting up her little cousin's eyes she added, "You know I'm 'so old,' you'll let me speak."

"But he ought to try and like going out more for my sake," persisted she.

"He's a strong man, who has made his own life with purposes and objects in it; surely it is not wrong in him to hope to bend your ways—his dear little wife's—to his, rather than his to yours?"

Milly smiled.

"'And in the long years liker shall they grow,' Milly," she went on, with the tears gathering in her eyes; "if husband and wife don't draw nearer to each other, they drift farther apart—there is no standing still. Care for the things for his sake;

you'll come in time to care for them soon for their own."

The poor little wife looked up with a troubled gaze. "I'm not a bit fit for him. It's somebody like you whom he ought to have married, May. I've heard him admire you so," she sighed, quite unconscious of the past of her husband's life.

"You loved him, dear," answered May without taking any notice of this burst, "because you thought him better and nobler than yourself; it was the best part of you which cared for him; you knew that his love was better worth than all the flirting in the world," she said, trying to smile as she passed her hand caressingly round the beautiful little face, "and in your heart you thank God you have such a man, and are very proud of him and of all his doings. You know you don't *really* think you'd rather have had the lower and the less good in life, one bit. You'll follow on to where he is, and take interest in what interests him."

"He doesn't care for my interest," answered Milly sadly. "You saw how I did ask him about his business."

"But if you took so little pains to understand it, that you destroyed his Report, how can he think such care worth having, dear? Suppose he'd

crushed up your bonnet into a ball for baby?" went on May, laughing gently.

"I *will* try, I will try, May," said Milly, jumping up off the ground on which she had seated herself. "I will be a good wife to him. I wish you were always with me, I *do* love you dearly, May! and it's very good of me, when you give me such frightful lectures," she ended, with a storm of kisses.

The Wilmots dined every night in Curzon Street during their short stay in London, until Lionel carried off his little wife to his home in the country.

"I'm sure I hope it may answer," said Cecilia, with a shrug, after one of these evenings; "I can't think how ever they will get on down there at Brickwall, with Aunt Emma to be perpetually sensible, and give the most distractingly good advice."

"I don't think that Lionel means to stay long in England, from what he said," observed May, taking her candle to go to bed. "He seems too fond of his army work now."

"He may have a good appointment almost when he pleases, I heard to-day," said the Colonel; "he is thought very highly of at Head Quarters. And that pretty little graceful flirt, who looks as if she came off a French fan, will hardly be satisfied with a quiet country life."

"It's more the pleasure of giving pleasure with Milly than any more sinister motive," said May zealously; "she'll take any trouble for the person to whom she is devoting herself at the moment. I've seen her give herself as much pains to be delightful to an old woman or a child as to the very brightest of Her Majesty's army or navy."

"Her little mill always seems to me to accept as grist whatever admiration comes in its way," laughed Cecilia.

"Well, after all, a flirt is only a person with an exaggerated desire to please, and that's a very pleasant thing, and the early stages of the species, at all events before it is hardened by the world, are certainly very charming," answered the Colonel smiling.

And, indeed, it is a real gift, if only the owner knows how to use it, to be received like sunshine, to cause every one to smile when you come into a room, when everything you say and do has a charm of its own. It is a grace, and not a virtue, no doubt, but so much good work is marred by its absence, which makes some of the excellent of the earth grate on the tastes and tempers of their friends to such an extent as to undo half their influence, that one is sometimes tempted to put the "duty" of being plea-

sant very high. It must surely be a grand mistake which makes the good even seem repulsive.

"Was there ever anything between Lionel and your sister?" went on the Colonel to his wife, when May had left the room.

"Oh no, I don't believe it in the least; do you mean that May ever cared for Lionel? What made you think so?"

"Quite the contrary—that she didn't care. I hardly know what it was; something in his exceedingly grave manner to her, perhaps, and the incongruousness of his marrying that pretty plaything—as if it might be the consequence of a rebound."

Cecilia did not answer; it was strange to her how often the Colonel was right, how shrewdly sometimes he heard and understood, when she, absorbed in herself, had been entirely unconscious and blind; she felt sure that he had guessed something very like the truth.

"You've been very kind, May," said Lionel gravely, the last evening, as he went down the stairs of the hotel with her to put her into the carriage which her careful brother-in-law had sent to bring her home. She had spent the whole day with Milly, giving her untiring, calm, sympathising help in the flurry and worry of the interminable packages and commissions.

"I'm sure I don't know what that poor child would have done without you in London," he went on with a sigh. "Won't you go in again, dear?" he turned to say anxiously to his wife, as Milly's pretty little head appeared over the banisters, calling out her adieux from the top of the stairs, regardless of the passers-by in the hotel: "Good-bye, Maykin; good, dear Maykin! How soon shall you come to us again?"

"There's a capital woman's heart under those childlike ways," answered May quickly; "give her the best you have, Lionel, don't leave her to the bonnets. It will be your own fault if you don't make her good for all the things which you want—she is so young and she loves you dearly." Lionel smiled in spite of himself. "And when one is so pretty and so charming, it must be very hard not to like other people to admire one a little. But if she finds her best sympathy and sunshine at home she won't really care for any other, she won't indeed, Lionel, it's all in her," she pleaded earnestly.

His face brightened as he closed the carriage door and leant over it to shake hands with her gratefully, though without speaking. He was a man of few words, but the expression of his face was a comfort to her as he turned once more on the steps of the

hotel, almost unconsciously, to look after her as she drove away, with a sigh and something of a heart-ache for both sides of the incongruous pair in whom she had so strong and deep an interest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WAITING AT THE EXHIBITION.

"By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world."—*Merchant of Venice*.

THE winter was nearly over, it was towards the end of February; Lionel Wilmot had accepted a fresh appointment abroad; and May coming in to breakfast one morning found two letters waiting for her on the table, and was soon laughing over Milly's report of her own exploits at their new station.

"We'd our first dinner-party yesterday, grand, and I was a little too late dressing, which Lionel can't bear, and at the supreme moment I got confused and forgot, and made such blunders! Sent down a terrible Mrs. Lieut.-Colonel something-or-other wrong, (such an ugly cross old thing!), and then we all came into a muddle, and hardly anybody sat by the other right bodies, and the Lieut.-Colonel alongside me was savage, because they care a great deal about precedence and that like here; and Lionel looked vexed, and we were all so stupid and tiresome. But

after dinner I made my apologies very prettily" ("I am sure you did," commented May to herself), "and the old hag was so cross, and gave me an acid smile, and said she must send me the army and navy lists, and I told her I'd been so frightened, and she must be my army list, and mollified her, and then I asked Lionel to have in two of the band, and the young ones' feet began to wag and the old ones' tongues too, and we got on quite nicely. And I didn't dance at all, in order to be 'good,' you know, and to do the hostess, but Lionel says I shall soon; and I'd bought myself a new black velvet gown to look venerable and grand, and Lionel laughed at me after all was over, and said I looked younger than ever in it" ("and prettier," inserted May between the lines). "*That'll* go on all right now, I hope and believe," mused she to herself with something between a smile and a sigh.

The other letter was from Tom, saying that he intended to come up for a few days with his wife to London, for some public meetings and some private shopping.

It would be a great pleasure to May "to see his dear old face again," as she said to herself more cheerfully than usual, and she was full of interest in finding a lodging for them, and in welcoming and

making much of the two when they arrived. It rejoiced her very heart to hear the cheery voice which reminded her so strongly of old Fernyhurst days. Sophia was profoundly engrossed in her own small concerns, and expected May to be perpetually at her beck and call during her brief visit; and May, glad to find herself wanted, submitted with a good grace to be made use of in everything and everywhere. It is one of the penalties, however, of life for a single woman, as it is now understood, that she is never supposed to have any definite work of her own, but may be considered as always ready to do everything for other people which they don't care or are not able to do for themselves.

"I want you to meet me this afternoon at the British Institution pictures, May, after I come back from the clerical meeting," said Tom one morning in Curzon Street. "Sophia declares she must be painted, and there are some portraits there by a man she's heard of who is not too expensive."

"My mother has seen a sweet head of Mrs. Graves, at the dear old Dean's, whose style she thought would suit me admirably," observed Sophia with great earnestness.

"I wish you'd come too, Cecilia, and help us to decide," declared Tom.

Cecilia shrugged her shoulders a little at being thus made use of. At the time fixed, however, she dropped May at the door of the British Institution in Pall Mall, that most charming home for ancient pictures, —now, alas! gone for ever,—on whose walls most of the finest treasures in English country houses have in turn been seen; a place so quiet, yet in the way for every one, beautifully lighted, large enough to show the pictures to advantage, yet not admitting more than could be thoroughly enjoyed at once. Its destruction has been a real loss to art.

“They mayn’t have arrived perhaps, but you won’t mind waiting,” said her sister. “I shall go on to Hardinge’s, and pick you up as I come back.”

The two real species into which the world is divided are those who wait and those who are waited for. There is no outward and visible sign by which they may be recognised, but the distinction is no less real. You see a father, patiently or impatiently, waiting for his wife and one after another of his daughters, or you see the whole family waiting for its chief; but in each case it is admitted as a perfect right, the waiter is restless or patient, but neither he nor she ever resists fate, while it never occurs to the waited-for to question the legitimacy of their power in thus keeping four or five people in attendance.

So much so, indeed, that if by any rare accident they are themselves beforehand, it is with a bland and dignified sense of injury that they say, "My dear, I have been waiting several minutes," as an unheard-of phenomenon—with an utter unconsciousness that they have been inflicting hours of the same purgatory for years.

Cecilia had always been waited for—May was of the waiters, and accordingly she took up her station quite resignedly on a hard bench, for the winter exhibition was a modern one, and generally not of the best, while she had not much heart to begin and hunt out its very scattered beauties alone.

She sat on within sight of the staircase which opened into the middle of the second room, watching vaguely for the others to arrive, when suddenly she saw Walter's head appear, coming slowly up the steps. She was not thinking about him, the sight was quite unexpected, and she had given her face no orders how to behave on the occasion. In the suddenness of the attack it expressed just what she was feeling, which was a good deal, and, according to its wont, very vividly. Her whole face lighted up with welcome, and she held out her hand. It was an expression which he had never seen there before as existing for him, and which he had longed for as a

thirsty man in the desert for water. He came up to her, hardly knowing what he was doing, and stood by her holding her hand in his own without speaking, almost dizzy with strong feeling. She was the first to recover herself, and as she turned away with a deep blush she said as a sort of excuse, "I was expecting Tom."

"You don't mean that you took me for him?" he answered almost reproachfully, bending over her as he spoke.

She did not answer; she could not honestly say that she did.

"Have you seen the Stanfield?" he added a moment after; "they say that there is one here."

"No, I was waiting for Tom and Louisa."

"So am I, he appointed me here, but they won't have far to look, they'll find us fast enough," he said with a smile; "come."

Nothing is so perfect for a *tête-à-tête* as a picture gallery. Your backs are legitimately turned upon the world in general. Your heads are bound by the hypothesis to be engaged in the contemplation of what is before you; there is occupation and interest for any length of time, and in which nobody can discover anything to find fault with.

So they went round the rooms together. If the

pictures were good, there was much to be said; if they were bad, there was more; and the old racy, uncouth talk, full of half-suppressed thought and feeling, which had always had such charm for her, even when the man had not, began again. She forgot herself in the different subjects, her whole soul glowed again as of old in the strong interest which possessed her. If it flagged for a moment and he felt that she was drawing back again into her shell, he had power enough to start afresh, until at last, as they touched on some of their old war topics, he said with a smile—"Ah, you are shaking a red rag before the bull, but you shan't make me quarrel to-day, even for the sake of America;" when Tom's voice was heard in the distance, and she turned quickly to meet him with the half-ended words still ringing in her ears.

"I'm afraid we're very late. I'm so sorry," said Tom, hurrying up. "Sophia was such a time at the china-shop; I hope we have not kept you too long?"

"Oh no, not in the very least," answered Walter, most truthfully in earnest.

"Have you found number fifty-seven," said Sophia solemnly; "and how do you like it?"

May had entirely forgotten the luckless portrait,

and was only too glad of the excuse of assisting now to hunt it out in order to avoid any further questions concerning the employment of their time.

In a few moments appeared Cecilia. She knew nothing of art, and two, at least, of the others understood a good deal about it; but she could tell what the world said, which was a great deal more important, and with her few apt, short remarks, very much to the point, she settled the whole business of the portrait at once. It requires a great deal of talent, tact, and character to be a real fine lady; whether the play is worth the candle is, of course, a point which people decide differently.

"I am going with Scrope, and you will take Sophia with you," said Tom, as he helped to put the three ladies into Cecilia's carriage, rejoicing to have disposed so satisfactorily of his wife.

And it was not till the door was shut, and the two had walked away together, that May remembered how in her confusion she had not wished Walter good-bye, or even shaken hands with him, and that nothing had been said about meeting again.

But there were more important questions on hand.

"Where shall I take you to?" said Cecilia, turning to her sister-in-law.

"Oh anywhere," replied Sophia, settling herself

down with great glee for a course of visits and shops.

Now Cecilia did not at all approve, as May well knew, of going about with her elegant little clarence "stuffed up" with three women. Moreover, she did not much relish dragging about her "country cousin" to her cream of the cream haunts; while Sophia, serene in the consciousness of the very last new bonnet, and considering herself the model both of fashion and of virtue, was ready for anything from a visit to the Queen down to Madame Tussaud.

Cecilia looked a little disgusted in a polite way, and May, feeling that she could relieve one part of the dilemma at least, proposed—

"Put me out, dear, at the bottom of the Queen's Walk; I want a little fresh air, and I will go straight across the Park home."

"What will Egerton say to your walking alone?" repeated Cecilia, with the sort of borrowed conscience from her husband which she sometimes showed—but the thing was done.

May rejoiced, as she breasted the sharp north-easter, at the solitude and the liberty to think over the past half-hour. She did not know that anything more would come of her meeting with Walter, as she repeated to herself, but at all events they were

friends again ; and she felt as if, after having been a year on short commons of dainty pastry, she had suddenly had a meal of bread and meat.

By night, however, all her self-tormenting had returned again ; she ought not, perhaps, to encourage him, he could manifestly do so much better for himself than to think of her, even if he were so inclined, and the remembrance of the Colonel's code of the duties required for him by his "family and his position" came back upon her mind forcibly. Besides, after all, there was probably nothing in his manner to her but compassion and friendliness.

"I was very near asking Scrope to dine here with us," said Tom to Cecilia, as he and his wife came in that evening to Curzon Street ; "but I couldn't do it without your leave. I should be particularly glad, if you don't mind ; I hardly ever see him now."

"You may ask him for to-morrow," replied his sister graciously, but without the smallest thought of May.

She saw how unsuspicious they all were of there being any feeling for her on his side, and it gave her a qualm as to its reality, which she could not get over the whole of the next busy day, as she worked hard to fulfil Sophia's unconscionable and contradictory requirements.

Accordingly in the evening, when Walter arrived at the house, the cold chill was upon her, and she scarcely spoke to him; she had had time to think, and she drew back while he was occupied with his civilities to the others, and sat listening in absorbed silence to a comfortable dowager's description of the alterations in her back bed-room in the country. Even the most interesting details, however, concerning "there was such difficulty about the chimney, my dear, you see, until I contrived to get three feet six out of the staircase . . ." failed in fixing her attention, though she resolutely avoided turning her head. At all events, if anything was to come of it, it should be without her stirring even a finger. She had not had a word with Walter when they all went down to dinner, where he sat by Cecilia in the place of honour, and a scrap or two of the talk between these two most incongruous associates occasionally reached her.

"Yes, I do like the man; and that he's made his own position is much more to his credit than if he'd merely inherited it," he said rather doggedly, in answer to some remark of his hostess.

"Ah, we know what a rank Radical you were, Mr. Scrope," replied Cecilia, smiling; "but I hoped that you'd improved a little by this time."

"The way I've been distressed by the noise in the mews behind my new house, there's no telling, and then the cats and the sparrows up at three o'clock in the morning, I'm sure! Why doesn't government interfere?" meandered the dowager in a gentle stream of twaddle on the other side.

"I'm afraid that this government is not likely to do anything half so useful as suppressing the sparrows," said the Colonel good-naturedly.

"Such a strange appointment! They say that he has hardly sixpence to live on, and an empty sack has difficulty in standing upright sometimes, the world says, you know," went on Cecilia.

"I hope you don't think your spoons in danger now," replied Walter, laughing, "for I assure you that I'm quite as poor as he is."

He seemed in rather a defiant mood. Had his state of mind anything to do with her? thought May as she sat on through the long hour depressed and silent, struggling to seem interested in her neighbour's talk, and never looking towards the other end of the table lest Walter might think that she was appealing to his remembrance. She went up-stairs again, feeling saddened to the heart. Was it her own fault or his? Had she been so cold and repellent that he really could not be expected to come

near her? or was it that he did not desire it? She stood listening to Sophia's platitudes and enthusiasms without hearing or seeing anything, but answering yes and no at the proper intervals, which entirely satisfied that lady, who enjoyed the sound of her own voice beyond any other music.

"I declare Mr. Scrope is as great a bear as ever. I thought he might have become a little more civilized. But it's no wonder, they say he hardly ever goes into society," said Cecilia complainingly, as the ladies drew round the fire in the drawing-room.

"We used to know poor Lord Ardmore's grandmother very well," sighed the old lady, "and it was such a pity——"

May looked up quickly.

"So sad his being killed in that way! Nobody ever saw or heard of the present man; he's lived quite out of the world, they say, down in the north, and with no end of children. Such a loss as the last lord was! He dined with me only last year; he always looked so cross, poor fellow, and he's quite run out the estate, I hear."

Presently the gentlemen appeared, and Tom came and sat down affectionately by his sister. Immediately after Walter very deliberately drew up a chair exactly in front of her, placed himself upon it

so that she could not stir, and began to talk to Tom across her. A strange shy feeling came over her; she rose, but there was a look in his eyes, half reproach, half entreaty, which she could not withstand, and she sank down quietly once more and listened to the talk of the two old friends as if she were in a dream.

"It seems like pleasant, dead old days at Fernyhurst," said Tom, with a sort of sigh, as they found themselves falling back upon all their past discussions. "You must come down there soon, Scrope, and enlarge your mind on turnips. Hastings has gone in for high farming (or at least Donaldson for him), and you should see him looking wise over the last new reaping-machine, and not quite sure which is the stem and which is the stern, as Charlie would say."

"Then he'll learn. You don't mean that a man's to be run into a mould like a pig of cold iron at *any* time in his life, stereotyped for evermore everlastingly."

"It must be very fatiguing though to be always growing out fresh boughs all round every year as you do," replied Tom, laughing.

"Like the trees at Fernyhurst," said May with a smile; "how do they all do?"

"What, the trees? When are you coming to see them? They want you back sadly, and the old women go on to no end about 'Miss May,' and when they are to see her again."

"The people's memory is long and deep," said Walter musing, "slow to grow and strong to retain. They haven't so many things to dissipate their thoughts and affections probably."

"Do you think living all the year round down among the oxen increases the brilliancy of one's thoughts and affections?" asked Tom with a wry face. "I'm afraid I don't find it so."

"It gives you a chance of some original ones, at any rate. You don't get your politics out of your daily paper, and your literature from your weekly one, at all events."

"No, we make up for it by having neither literature nor politics at all," answered Tom, laughing.

"Mr. Drayton managed to keep both going," put in May with a smile.

"But the new generation are more stirring and want more variety of interests and work."

"They're only more restless," said Walter, smiling, "that's all."

"Listen to him! He'll turn out an old Tory after everything's said, I believe."

"I'm not so sure that 'getting on' is the *summum bonum* of life, nationally or individually."

"At all events it's what has set the Anglo-Saxon race where it is," answered Tom.

"To make the best of your position and of yourself in it, no doubt that's all right; but I don't see how always to want to get out of it can be a wise ideal."

"It's the essence of modern civilization, anyhow."

"Modern civilization, as you call it, is nothing but a question of outsides; it's a sort of varnish not even skin deep."

"Like the bloom on a plum, very pretty and pleasant though," said May with a smile; but though she occasionally threw in a word or two, she was very silent.

"We are going to the Crystal Palace to-morrow, Scrope" (it was still in the first bloom of its novelty), said Tom towards the end of the evening. "Do come. Saturday's a half-holiday for all the prentice lads. I'm sure you can get away if you choose. Do come with us," he insisted affectionately, "I've so few days here, you know."

"I'll try," answered Walter; and he added in a low voice after a short pause, "Your sister seems as if she wanted fresh air sadly, she looks quite ill."

I'm afraid London does not suit her." But he did not turn towards the pale sad face which was unlike the picture of her in his mind of old Fennyhurst days. "I will follow you, if I can get away and meet you at three near the music."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TETE-A-TETE IN A CROWD.

"True as the dial to the sun,
Although it be not shined upon."

LOVELACE.

SOPHIA was somewhat jealous of Tom's affection for his sister, and it was rather an uncomfortable trio for their expedition next day. She generally interfered when her husband launched off into the innumerable old jokes and allusions which a man must have with the sister of so many years, and not with the wife of little more than one. She always refused to understand the explanations which she every time elaborately insisted on having given to her; she grew very cross and made herself generally and particularly disagreeable the whole time. At last May was thankful to draw back when they reached the band, and to sit silent and solitary behind the other two. She felt very lonely, even Tom's wished-for visit was lost to her for any pleasure that it seemed likely to give.

She woke up out of a rather dreary reverie at the

end of a noisy finale, and saw Walter standing, with his eyes fixed upon her, at a little distance.

"Oh, there you are, dear old fellow!" cried Tom, rising eagerly. "How glad I am! I was just beginning to give you up," and he put his arm in his in old schoolboy fashion. "Did you ever see such a figure as he makes of himself! Only look at his coat!" said he, turning to his sister; "he's become a co-operative tailor, or grocer, or something. It's a philanthropic coat. I'm sure it ought to be very virtuous to make up for being so intolerably hideous."

"I'm afraid," observed Sophia, with her very wisest look and manner, "that there is considerable danger now of encouraging socialism among the working-classes. The Dean says that to interfere in this way with——" when Walter, without attending, stooped his long body past her, where it had no business whatever to be, in order to be quite sure of the cordial smile towards his obnoxious coat on May's face under her averted bonnet.

"And now let us go wherever you like, Scrope," said Tom. "Didn't you say you wished to look at the Michel-Angelo Court again?"

"I wanted to have seen the acrobats," complained Sophia; "Miss Graves said that she saw them in the Crystal Palace when she was here once."

"But it's impossible, Sophia; they're not here to-day," remonstrated her husband.

"She told me it was something quite *too* remarkable," persisted she plaintively, "and I never saw acrobats."

"I've the very greatest respect for Tom's abilities; but even he can't improvise acrobats, I'm afraid,

'For what's impossible can't be,
And *very* seldom comes to pass.'

said Walter solemnly, with an unsuccessful attempt at consolation.

They moved on; Sophia, of course, took her husband's arm, and May and Walter followed silently after. But the Michel Angelos were a long way off, and the path to them was a thorny one, and beset with pitfalls and snares, for Sophia could not be got past the stalls of shops by any persuasion which her husband liked to administer.

"Oh, Tom, you *must* ask the price of that work-box." And presently, as with much trouble they got on a little farther, "Oh! look at that sweet little butter-dish like a melon! I must know how much it costs," she went on, laying hold of her husband's arm as if with a vice. And she was so exceedingly determined, that, in spite of his distaste, Tom was forced to do her bidding.

May leant wearily against the counter of the glass-shop, and Walter stood in silence beside her.

"You'd better take my arm," he said at last in a business-like tone, shortly and gravely; "you'll be tired." But as soon as it was fairly within his grasp, he turned to Tom—"If we were anyhow to lose each other, it is better to appoint a meeting-place. Suppose we say the chocolate stall at the end of the building in an hour. Mrs. Dimsdale will like to rest herself there, as she says she can't walk much more," he said, with a forced smile at Sophia.

Some sight-seers pressed before them as he spoke; he had to retreat before a fat woman who squeezed in by the corner of the stall, with a "By your leave, sir," and in another moment May found herself drawn along at a rapid pace right up the nave, under the influence of a strong will, which she had neither the power nor the wish to resist. They neither of them spoke as they hurried along. At last he brought her out where the wave of sight-seers had ebbed and left the open balconies looking out towards the garden, solitary in the waning February day. He set her in the corner deliberately, whence there was no retreat, and placed himself resolutely beside her—it was now or never. She leant over the balustrade. "How beautiful the

distances are, even in such a grey day as this!" she said, trembling as she spoke.

"May," he began, without taking any notice of her words, "why did you make me welcome so that my heart burned within me on one day, and the next receive me as if you never wished to see me again, and now keep me at arm's length in this manner? If you knew what pain you put me to, dear, I am sure you would not inflict it. My darling," he went on, "no one feels more than I do how little worthy I am of you, but it seems to me almost as if my love were something different from myself, and is so deep, and true, and tender, and has lasted so many years, that if I could but show it to you, May (which I can't, just because it is so deep), I think you would try and see whether you couldn't take it. Try, May; let me see you again as we used to do. We used to be friendly together at least; be friendly with me again. I don't care how long I wait," he said, with an unconscious sigh, that told how much he did care. "Nothing will ever make me stop loving you, unless you married some one else; not even death," said he earnestly. "Try it, May." He had taken hold of the hand lying on the balustrade beside him, and his pressure was almost painful. "Come to cheer me, and help me,

and care for me through life, until death do not us part!"

"You don't know me!" cried she passionately; "I'm grown so stupid, and sad, and dull, that I can't cheer or help any one. You ought to have much better help than me. There never was a great deal in me, and now I believe that I've lost the little I ever had. Alicia says that I'm grown so silly that I hardly understand when I'm spoken to—and it's very nearly true," she ended with a tearful smile.

"Have you any other such admirable and convincing reasons?" said he, laughing in the midst of his earnest pleading. "My darling, is it your spirit or your joy that I want, do you think? I want *you*, the you that is behind and above them all."

"Ah, but the me is changed, I believe. You ought to know me first," and she tried earnestly to draw away her hand. "The old days threw a false light upon me. You ought to wait and know me now."

"Know you! you child," he said, getting hold of her other hand; "why, what have I done these seven long years but know you only too much by heart, from every tone in your voice to the tying of your shoe-string?"

"But I'm so little worth—not good enough to be anybody's comfort."

"Won't you let me be the judge of that? May, don't you see you haven't said the only word which will ever make me leave your side now?" and he put his arm round her. "Look up in my face and say, if you have the heart, that you don't care for me who love you so well, and then I will go."

Instead of which she hid her face on his shoulder and whispered—

"I do—I do!"

For a moment she was so confused in his passionate grasp that she let him kiss her again and again. But at last she tried to draw herself laughing away. "We shall have the people paying sixpence for a sight of us if we don't mind."

"And a very improving and interesting sight, too," answered he, with much gravity; "I shall be most happy to give it them again whenever they wish it, even without the sixpence."

"And then," she said, almost to herself, with a blush, "I can't bear now when you have much to give and I have nothing It seems"

He looked at her puzzled for a moment, and then said gravely, "I'm ashamed of you, May. Do you think if good things had happened to you that I

should have suspected them of dividing me from you?"

And she was ashamed, and hid her face again, and the same process was about to be repeated when she remonstrated in earnest.

"You've never called me Walter yet. Say, 'Walter, please not to do it, because I love you very much, and then I'll stop.'"

"Please, Walter, not to do it."

"But the reason? Why? You can't expect me to stop without a reason."

"What, upon compulsion! No, not if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries."

And it was only on the testimony of Falstaff that he began to realize the truth of his victory.

They lingered on in the failing light till the great clock began to strike. "Oh! Walter, listen—it is so late," she cried, trying to hurry him off to the place of meeting

"Stop a little while still, dear," he said, as they slowly left their quiet retreat. "Look at me; speak to me again and make me sure that it's all real. It seems as if it were a dream—as if it could hardly be true. I have longed and thought of this so long and so uselessly, that it seems to me unreal even yet, as if I hardly could be told often enough that it is

really and truly May that belongs to me—my very own May.”

She clasped her hands upon his arm. “Dear, you won’t want much telling from this time, you’ll see it only too plain in my heart and in my face;” and she looked up shyly at him, with eyes full of happy tears, and a smile on her lips; and then they passed on slowly and lingeringly back again together into the outer world.

They came presently in sight of Tom, who was looking out eagerly for them, and watching anxiously for the expression on their faces.

“I think he at least will be pleased,” said Walter.

She smiled. “He’ll be more glad than any one; he’s been your fast friend, Walter, all through, and never forgave me three years ago. But I wish we could help telling any one else just now, and get quietly back to London for this one night.”

Sophia was so deep in her chocolate, and so full of the things she had seen, and the fatigue she felt, and her explanations, and her grief at having lost Mr. Scrope, that she had no leisure to notice any one else’s feelings, or to inquire even what the others had been about.

“It’s all right,” said Walter laconically, but with a smile which told a great deal, in answer to Tom’s

inquiring looks; and in another moment May felt her brother stooping affectionately over the back of her chair.

"I don't think I ever was so glad of anything in all my life," whispered he under cover of his wife's reproaches to Walter for not getting something for May to eat.

"I'm shocked to see you so inattentive to ladies, Mr. Scrope," said she, with what was meant for playful humour. "I'm afraid from what I've heard that it's rather your way."

"You'd better make haste and finish, Sophia; it's quite time for us to be off," put in her husband a little impatiently.

Then as they made their way along towards the station Sophia went on, "I never saw anybody grown so stupid as your friend, Tom; he hardly speaks or looks at one. What's the matter with him, I wonder? But I never did like him at all. What did you ask him to come with us for I can't think. I'm quite sorry that May should have had such a tiresome man with her all the afternoon."

"I don't think May will much mind it. You know she's known him a long time, in old days at Fernyhurst," replied Tom with great gravity.

"That's no reason why he should make himself so

disagreeable," persisted she, looking back at the two others who were following them silently down the long flights of dingy steps, and into the lighted carriages of the train, with that strange feeling as if a partition had been suddenly let down between themselves and the rest of the world, and as if they were alone together though in the midst of a crowd.

"Come back with us, do, Scrope," said Tom, when they reached London, as he put his ladies into a cab, and his arm into his friend's, the feeling of their old friendship strong within him as they took their way together through the crowded streets. Life had drifted them far apart, and to Tom at least the joy of being thus once more linked to the hero of his boyish days was very great; and though, "silent as we grow when feeling most," after the fashion of the British, Walter's sympathies were not expressed in many words, yet he somehow managed to make them pretty well understood before they reached the lodging.

"It's a very fine night; if you choose to walk home, May, I will take you to Curzon Street," said Tom to his sister a few minutes after they came in, when Walter silently rose to go away.

"Oh, you're going, Mr. Scrope, good-night," yawned Sophia from her sofa, a little ungraciously.

"You'll mind, May, and come back to-morrow as soon as you can; I shall want you early very much."

"Unless she's otherwise engaged, you mean," said Tom, with as much seriousness as he could muster.

"Oh, but she's never engaged, I know; and I must have her to go with me to the artist's about the picture," called out Sophia as the three went down-stairs together.

"You ought to be very much obliged to me, May, for my generosity and good-feeling, and all the cardinal virtues, for I know that I shan't get a word of good out of him now you're come with us, or with you either, for that matter," said her brother with a smile, as she took his arm when they reached the street, and Walter came round to her other side.

London was a very beautiful town to them that sharp February night,—genial and bright, full of a warm light shining on ugly walls and dirty pavements, and transfiguring its commonplace streets and leafless squares as they went along, with the joy of their own hearts.

"I'm sure I'm glad I'm not in love," said Tom, with a rueful countenance however, when he found himself taken round nearly three sides of Berkeley Square. "It's very expensive in shoe-leather."

"We're going quite the best way. You've forgotten your London, Tom," replied his friend with the utmost gravity.

"I hope you'll think it so a year hence, my dear fellow."

"I'm not afraid," muttered Walter, taking his place, when Tom dropped good-naturedly a little "astern" at the next crossing, with, "There's not room enough for three—not even for the parson."

"Have you heard," he went on presently, "that Charlie has found his fate at last? (You must begin to get up your new brothers-in-law, Scrope.) Yes, he's going to marry the Admiral's Lucy, and he has found out that he's been in love with her, and her only, ever since she was eight years old! I wonder what Milly will say to this new reading of constancy—past loves are like last year's leaves, best put underground to nourish new ones, I suppose."

But it may be doubted whether Walter profited as much as he ought by this interesting philosophical disquisition, while he stood on the steps of the house in Curzon Street watching May 'as she disappeared into the lighted hall, and the door closed after her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SPRING TIME IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

"On grass, or gravel, in the sun,
Or now beneath the shade,
I watched in pleasant Kensington
A prentice and a maid.

"Ah, years may come and years may bring
The truth that is not bliss,
But will they bring another thing
That will compare with this."

A. H. CLOUGH.

THE next morning, at an unconscionably early hour before breakfast, Walter was knocking at Colonel Seymour's door long before anybody was ready for his company, and he was obliged to put up with May, in the undusted drawing-room, to the horror of the ejected housemaids. "Though it is not you a bit whom I came to see," he explained, laughing; "I'm here only for business, lawful guardians, and the rest of it."

"You see, after all, you've more than I have in the world, at all events for the present," said he a few minutes after, when they came to the discussion together of ways and means. "It's very shocking to

think how I'm only marrying you for your money, May," he went on, with one of his old solemn contortions of face.

May's happy laugh was pleasant to hear. "What, you haven't forgiven me yet? Revenge is low-minded and mean, remember."

"I shall have three weeks' holiday at Easter, or I can make them," said he at last to May, who "did not see any hurry." "You don't mean that you were thinking of putting me off till the summer? Yes, I *am* in a great hurry—a hurry to be happy. Do you think when a man has been waiting seven years, serving for Rachel (and he didn't find it a short time at all, I can tell you), it is not time to be in a hurry? Suppose we say next week? Gowns! You don't mean to say that you're going to keep me waiting for gowns? Why shouldn't you be married in that one you've got on? I'm sure it's a very pretty one."

But in spite of this desperate state they contrived to have a great deal of pleasure during the weeks of waiting for lawyers' work, and the delays which even the most impatient cannot overcome.

As the buds burst in Kensington Gardens, they strolled about among the great trees almost as quietly as in Fernyhurst woods of old, and enjoyed it as much as if they had been there.

They were sitting together under a magnificent old beech one bright spring day, looking out on the exquisite green of the young leaves, which seem still more fresh and delicate contrasted with their black stems, and the dingy houses of the town, seen in glimpses between the trees. The green glades lay in every direction dappled with flickering shadows, flecked with spots of light—little specks of brilliant colour, scarlet and blue, varied with white, twinkled in and out on the distant sunny slopes; the sun shone, the birds sang, the babies played and shouted, tumbling like puppies one over the other on the springing grass; solemn old London seemed to have grown young, washed its face, and brightened into a smile under the April's cheery influence, while more than one edition of the old idyl in very different ranks of life was to be seen going on up and down the gardens.

"I can't think how I could be so impertinent as to ask you when I did it that first time, May," said he abruptly, looking up with a smile after a long pause, as he sat at her feet upon one of the great roots of the tree; "without anything to offer of any kind, not even a penny to live on! 'pour l'amour of my beautiful self' alone."

"Oh no," said May, laughing; "you know you

wanted me to help you in your work—it was a great compliment.”

“Yes, that little item, the regeneration of the human race, with which one starts in life. Well, it is to be hoped I’ve learned something since then—a little modesty, at all events, and mistrust of oneself. De Tocqueville’s only aspiration, perhaps, ‘une modeste et savante ignorance.’ But two *are* better than one to do God’s work in the world, dear—stronger than man and woman alone—all to nothing. I was right there, at all events, in the mist of my self-conceit,” he went on, as he drew her arm within his own for their long, pleasant walk home across the high, open, breezy ground of the upper part of the park, which is generally quiet, and but very little frequented by idlers. Presently he pointed to the faint outline of the Crystal Palace on the distant hills.

“I shall always have a great respect for that most useful and instructive institution. How much we enjoyed the Michel-Angelos that day, you remember! and art and science in general.”

“Yes; but you’ll take me to see them another time. I mustn’t be cheated of my ‘ploy’ there.”

“Ah, you want to see the acrobats—I understand,” laughed he. “No, you mustn’t pinch me. Why mayn’t I want to go to them as well as my betters?”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

SOPHIA was always convinced that it was owing to her own good management that May and Walter had come together. "It struck me, you know," she said confidently to her neighbour at the wedding breakfast, "how desirable it would be, considering their long acquaintance—and then we arranged, you know. . . . Crystal Palace, one day at last, you know . . . and old Lord Ardmore is such a fine-looking fellow—so much handsomer than Walter, so you see . . ." she ended looking across at the bridegroom as she gave this final and most convincing reason for the marriage.

Alicia made good any little shortcomings of her past behaviour most punctiliously; she was exceedingly anxious that May and her husband should come to Fernyhurst immediately, and pay any amount of visits they pleased. She would even have offered the duchess-dowager to meet them, and May might have had all the vases in the house, if she had wished it. "For when thou doest well for

thyself, all men shall praise thee," says the cynical old king of Israel.

May took greatly to her new family: the cordial, rough, north-country sisters—the "five-and-thirty feet of daughters" which their father was rather proud of; the gentle, over-worked mother, who was very thankful for her new child's help in their changed circumstances ("You know you'll take the girls out now, my dear, in London, and that'll be such a relief for me")—the old chief of the house, who received her so warmly.

It is seldom indeed that a marriage gives such universal satisfaction, though from such different reasons. Colonel Seymour approved because it satisfied his conscientious scruples to see his sister-in-law perform her duty "according to that station of life," &c., &c., as the catechism instructs us; Cecilia was glad because she liked the *éclat* of a wedding and its accompaniments, and it was a pleasant *dénouement* for what she was pleased to call "her anxieties" for May; Tom, because he dearly loved his sister and his friend, and thought their union one of the greatest events in his life; Sophia, because she liked being related to a future peer; and Hastings, because it rather amused him to see his wife's annoyance, one of whose first observations on the subject he had

happened to overhear (sighed almost unconsciously to herself), "It's an older peerage than ours. Now I shall have to go out after May."

"The house is so small and so far off," said Cecilia to her husband one hot August day that autumn when she had been visiting her sister; "and there was Walter looking as ungainly as usual. I had been scolding at him for letting her tire herself at that stupid women's class, and she said she liked it, and that it wasn't his doing, and she looked so happy when he came bursting in. I'm sure I can't understand it; and they're going to have I don't know how many of those great, big, awkward girls to stay with them, for her to chaperone!—as old, I daresay older, than herself! However, she did say they were going to Lady Palmerston's to-night, and that Walter liked seeing people much better now than he did. I'm sure I'm surprised to hear that he thinks anything so sensible, but there's never knowing what he'll do, or what he'll like, with all those strange fancies of his about everything."

"He'll get into Parliament, I hope, directly," answered the Colonel consolingly, "and that'll bring him into harness sooner than anything, you'll see."

"He'll never be like other people at all though," sighed Cecilia, shaking her head despondingly.

In spite, however, of these painful drawbacks to her happiness, there is something to be said for May's conviction, that it is better to endure any amount of loneliness in single life than to encounter a marriage where the truest love, in spite of all imperfections, was not to be found. There is no half-way house in wedded life, and no aching solitude like that of an ill-matched pair, so close and yet so far away, eternally bound together and yet for ever divided. It is a proof of the long-suffering of the human race that great numbers of wedded pairs do not "cut each other's throats and their own afterwards" every year, according to the Irish receipt, as the happiest solution of the dead-lock in which they have engaged themselves, after an acquaintance founded on duly dancing a certain number of galops and waltzes together—too much out of breath to speak—a garden party or two, a few dinners, and a squeeze,—admirable arrangements of society for enabling young people who desire to pass their lives together to become intimately acquainted with each other's tempers, dispositions, and characters—for a relation, on the wise and harmonious working of which so large a part of the welfare and happiness of the world must necessarily depend, and which, when at its best, will last, one must hope, in some sense at least, not only here, but for eternity.

NOTE TO CHAPTER XII.

M. LE PLAT, in the "Réforme Sociale en France," third edition, 1867, which reads almost like a prediction of the collapse in French institutions, gives a remarkable testimony to the value to the country of the class of resident English proprietors: "It is among them that the highest qualities of England are found personified; their manner of life seems to fit them to keep down wrong and encourage right in their neighbourhood, to repress corruption and extend reforms. A love of liberty, of duty, and of tradition in its best forms, of tolerance, and of respect for public opinion, is to be found generally amongst them. Their houses are the habitual homes of their owners, 'domestic hearths,' truly so called, where for generations, not far from the graves of the family, they have collected portraits, books, historical documents of all kinds, objects of art and of household use, serving to perpetuate the modest traditions or the glories of their ancestors. They are occupied with useful experiments for improving agriculture,—the races of horses, cows, and other domestic animals; while the kindly intercourse they hold with those who dwell in their cottages, and with successive generations of tenant farmers, who are generally without the protection of leases, implies a species of confidence of which the tradition is almost lost on the Continent. . . . They enjoy an influence which is rarely abused, for they desire to live well with electors, whose votes confer the most valued public posts, and have as great an interest in keeping good tenants as these can have in remaining. . . . They contribute in purse and person to the local expenses of good government, education, the poor, modes of communication, &c.; they serve gratuitously in public functions pertaining to the parish, the county, and the State. No other class of society can indeed pretend anywhere else to play such a part" And he traces a portion of the disintegrating process which has gone on in France to the absence of such a body.

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